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 Sabalenka's necklaces sparkle in the sun during French Open



**PIONEER IN SHORT**

**AI DELHI-SFO FLIGHT DIVERTS MIDAIR**

Air India's Delhi-San Francisco flight returned to the national Capital on Wednesday after remaining airborne for nearly nine hours due to a technical snag in its traffic collision avoidance system (TCAS). The Boeing 777 aircraft, carrying around 230 passengers, took off from Delhi at 3.09 am and landed safely at Indira Gandhi International Airport shortly after noon. According to flight-tracking data, the aircraft turned back after flying for over three hours through Chinese airspace.

**The Bystander**



## SC rejects challenge to SIR

The court stressed that electoral purity matters as much as polling

**RAJESH KUMAR**  
 New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in Bihar did not violate any law or Constitutional provisions. The court observed that the "SIR is a step towards an accurate and inclusive electoral roll" and that it breathes life into Constitution.

The bench ruled that the ECI's mandate to ensure free and fair elections is "expansive" and cannot be "extinguished" or "paralysed" by parliamentary legislation.

"In our considered opinion, the impugned SIR does not supplant the RP Act or the 1960 Rules. It rather breathes life into the constitutional mandate of Article 324 through the precise statutory conduit provided by Section 21(3). Therefore, it cannot be said that the Commission has acted in the teeth of an express statutory prohibition," the bench said.

The court dismissed the petitioners' view that SIR was a surreptitious, backdoor move to conduct citizenship screening in the name of cleaning up the electoral roll. The petitions had accused the ECI of arbitrarily assuming powers to "determine citizenship" while over-



The bench headed by the CJI held that SIR breathes life into the Constitution

riding limitations clearly prescribed in laws and its own manual without providing "any good reason".

In the 124-page judgment, the bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul Pancholi held that SIR is essential to preserving the integrity of free and fair elections. The bench agreed with the ECI's reasoning for the SIR that it has been more than two decades since the last intensive revision, large-scale additions and deletions over that

period, rapid urbanisation, migration, and the resulting possibility of repeated or defective entries to preserve the foundational integrity of polls.

Disposing of a batch of petitions challenging the SIR exercise in Bihar, the bench rejected arguments that SIR was resorted to in the State solely for administrative convenience, saying the exercise advances the "constitutional imperative of free and fair elections".

CONTINUED ON >> P4



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw speaking during the Cabinet briefing

### GOVT PUSHES AI TO POWER PDS

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
 New Delhi

The Union Government on Wednesday approved the SARTHAK-PDS scheme for the next five years till March 2031 with an outlay of ₹25,530 crore. The scheme aims to overhaul the Public Distribution Infrastructure (PDS) using AI and other emerging technologies, affecting about 81 crore people under the National Food Security Act.

The Cabinet also cleared revisions to norms governing margins at Fair Price Shops (FPS) and assistance given by the Union Government to States and Union Territories for movement and handling of food grains.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## Siddaramaiah set to exit

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA**  
 Bengaluru/New Delhi

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is likely to step down on Thursday for a change of guard in the State with deputy CM and State Congress President DK Shivakumar likely to take over. Siddaramaiah is expected to tender his resignation at around 11 am on Thursday, sources said. A number of ministers and legislators met Siddaramaiah at his residence on Wednesday and held discussions with him, sources added.

Siddaramaiah has sought time from the Governor for Thursday



Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah speaking to the media on Wednesday

and will host a breakfast meeting for his Cabinet colleagues at his official residence. This follows reports that the Congress high command has offering him a central role in the party, including a Rajya Sabha seat.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## ED raid on Pinarayi trigger protests

**J GOPIKRISHNAN**  
 Thiruvananthapuram

Enforcement Directorate (ED) raids linked to the financial dealings between former Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter's firm and a sand mining company triggered attacks on central agency officials in the State capital and Statewide protests by CPI(M) leaders and workers on Wednesday.

Severe violence broke out outside Vijayan's rented residence after ED officials completed the raid and were leaving the premises.

CPI(M) workers attacked at least three vehicles, including the one car-



Activists vandalising the vehicle carrying ED officials in Thiruvananthapuram

rying ED officials, outside Vijayan's residence, even as the police failed to prevent the violent mob. There were six ED officials in the vehicle, including a woman.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Available from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2026

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## Sadanira Samagam highlights India's ecological wisdom



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

A two-day national and international conclave on water conservation, sustainable development, Indian culture and the concept of Panchmahabhoot began at Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal on Wednesday under the Jal Ganga Conservation Campaign. Titled "Sadanira Samagam", the event has brought together policymakers, environmentalists, scientists, corporate leaders and diplomats from nine countries to deliberate on climate challenges, ecological balance and traditional Indian knowledge systems.

Addressing the inaugural session, Additional Chief Secretary for Culture, Religious Trusts and General Administration Shivshankar Shukla described the conclave as an important platform for dialogue on the relationship between water, nature and human civilisation. He said Madhya Pradesh, under the

leadership of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, is taking major steps towards water conservation and water self-reliance. He added that Indian culture considers water the foundation of life, consciousness and civilisation, and said the conclave would create meaningful dialogue between traditional wisdom and modern science.

Renowned water conservationist Rajendra Singh said ancient Indian scriptures such as the Rigveda and Atharvaveda contain scientific and visionary approaches towards water conservation. He stressed that balancing the five natural elements is essential for human survival and environmental stability. Hindustan Unilever Foundation CEO Dr Shraman Jha warned that water scarcity was emerging as one of the world's biggest challenges due to climate change, groundwater depletion and erratic rainfall.

Experts during different sessions highlighted the need for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, eco-tourism

and nature-friendly development models. Speakers also stressed the importance of involving younger generations in environmental protection and promoting sustainable lifestyles rooted in Indian cultural values.

The conclave also featured discussions on air quality, renewable energy, public health and environmental sustainability. Officials said the second day of the summit would focus on the elements of fire and sky, with experts from ISRO, Tata Trusts, ONGC, BHU and several other institutions participating in the discussions. Corporate representatives and environmental organisations participating in the event said India must combine community participation with scientific planning to tackle the growing climate crisis.

Officials said the conclave aims to create long-term awareness about responsible use of natural resources and strengthen public participation in water conservation campaigns across Madhya Pradesh and other states effectively.

## Students take anti-drug pledge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Indore

The Indore district administration and Excise Department continued their anti-drug awareness campaign with a special outreach programme organised at Acropolis Institute of Engineering and Technology on the city's bypass road at Mangaliya.

The campaign was conducted under the directions of Collector Shivam Verma and Assistant Excise Commissioner Abhishek Tiwari as part of the district's ongoing de-addiction initiative aimed at spreading awareness among youth and students about the harmful effects of substance abuse. Addressing students during the programme, Assistant Excise Commissioner Abhishek Tiwari said addiction not only damages an individual's physical and

mental health but also affects the happiness and stability of families and society. He urged students to stay away from intoxicants, adopt a healthy lifestyle and contribute positively towards society and nation-building.

Officials encouraged students to channel their energy and passion towards education, innovation and responsible citizenship rather than harmful addictions. Participants were also administered a pledge to remain drug-free and help spread awareness against substance abuse in society. Students enthusiastically participated in the awareness programme and appreciated the Excise Department's initiative. Officials said similar campaigns would continue to be organised in educational institutions and public places across the district in the coming months.



Durga Vahini activists participate in a Shaurya Yatra after the completion of their self defence training camp, in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo.

## Khajuraho hosts grand Yoga Day countdown event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Khajuraho

The historic Western Group of Temples in Khajuraho turned into a vibrant centre of wellness and spirituality on Wednesday as Madhya Pradesh hosted the 25-day countdown event for International Yoga Day 2026. The programme witnessed a unique blend of yoga, heritage and Indian cultural traditions against the backdrop of the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Union Minister of State for Ayush Prataprao Jadhav inaugurated the event, while Chief Minister Mohan Yadav joined virtually and addressed participants. Around 800 people, including yoga practitioners, students, officials and local res-



idents, took part in a mass yoga session that began at 6 am and continued for nearly two hours.

In his virtual address, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav described yoga as India's ancient spiritual heritage that has now become a global movement under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said both yoga and Khajuraho reflect India's timeless knowledge tradition and cultural strength

before the world. He added that the nationwide countdown programmes are helping spread awareness about healthy living, especially among the youth.

Union Minister Prataprao Jadhav said this year's International Yoga Day theme, "Yoga for Healthy Ageing", highlights the importance of yoga in ensuring physical and mental well-being in later stages of life. Ayush Ministry Joint Secretary Monalisa Das said yoga offers an effective solution to stress-driven modern lifestyles and appealed to people to participate in the Guinness World Record attempt scheduled for June 14, 2026.

BJP MP V.D. Sharma highlighted yoga's growing international recognition and thanked the government for approving a 50-bed Ayush Wellness Centre for Khajuraho. Ministers Dharmendra Lodhi and Inder Singh Parmar, along with legislators Arvind Pateria and Lalita Yadav, were also present at the event.

The programme also drew attention from BJP state secretary Archana Guddu Singh who reportedly not given space on the stage and was seen performing yoga among the public participants, triggering political discussions at the venue. Senior officials, yoga experts and representatives of Ayush and modern medical systems also attended the event, which reinforced Khajuraho's emerging identity as a major destination for wellness tourism and cultural diplomacy.

## Husband, wife found dead in locked room

**Satna:** Panic spread in Tivni village of Madhya Pradesh's Satna district on Wednesday morning after a couple was found dead inside a locked room of their house under mysterious circumstances.

Police said 45-year-old Ramniwas Kori was found hanging from the ceiling, while the body of his 43-year-old wife Shakuntala was lying on a wooden cot inside the room. The door was locked from inside and no external injury marks or blood stains were found at the scene.

Initial investigation by police and the FSL team has raised two possibilities — either the husband allegedly strangled his wife before dying by suicide, or the wife suffered a cardiac arrest after seeing her husband hanging.



Samarth Singh in police custody produced in the district court to hand over him to the CBI in connection with Twisha Sharma suicide case in Bhopal on Wednesday.

## IPS officer's adopted daughter found dead at Char Imli home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

A 17-year-old girl, the adopted daughter of IPS officer Sanjeev Kanchar, was found hanging at the family's residence in Bhopal's upscale Char Imli area on Tuesday afternoon, police said.

According to Habibganj police station in-charge Sanjeev Chouksey, the teenager was a Class 11 student. Police reached the spot after receiving information from family members. The body was sent for postmortem and later handed over to the family on Wednesday.

Investigators recovered a suicide note from the room. Assistant Commissioner of Police Umesh Tiwari said the note read: "Mummy-Papa, I love you very much, but I could not become a good daughter. I am sorry." However, the girl did not mention any specific reason behind the extreme step.

Police have seized the note and the teenager's mobile phone for forensic examination. Officials are analysing her recent calls, messages and social media activity to determine whether she was under

any emotional stress or external pressure.

The deceased's mother, Renuka Kanchar, is posted as a judge in the Bhopal Gas Relief Court. Police Commissioner Sanjay Singh confirmed that the girl had been legally adopted by the couple when she was just three months old.

Sources said investigators will also question the teenager's friends and classmates to understand whether there had been any recent behavioural changes or signs of mental distress. Since she had recently entered a new academic session, police are also examining whether study-related pressure may have contributed to the incident.

Officials said the case is being investigated from all possible angles. Detailed statements of family members are yet to be recorded, and police are awaiting the postmortem report and forensic findings for further clarity.

Police said counsellors and mental health experts may also be consulted during the investigation to better understand the teenager's emotional condition in the days leading up to the incident.

## Assistant professor trapped taking bribe of Rs 50,000

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Indore

Lokayukta Police on Tuesday trapped an assistant professor of Government College, Mandleshwar in Khargone district while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 50,000 near Dhamnod bypass in Dhar district.

The accused, Atmaram Solanki, was arrested during a trap operation at a roadside eatery after complainant Manoj Vaskel approached Lokayukta officials.

Vaskel alleged that Solanki had demanded Rs 4 lakh, claiming he had facilitated the transfer posting of Vaskel's wife, Urmila Vaskel, from Daloda in Mandasaur to a government college in Dhar through influence.

According to Lokayukta officials, Rs 1 lakh had already been paid earlier. After verification confirmed the complaint, a trap team was formed and Solanki was caught red-handed while taking another installment of Rs 50,000.

A case has been registered under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 2018.

## Passengers shaken after attack on Vande Bharat Express

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Ujjain

Panic gripped passengers aboard the Indore-bound Vande Bharat Express after unidentified miscreants allegedly pelted stones at the train near Ujjain late Monday night, damaging windows of multiple coaches. No injuries were reported, but the incident has once again raised serious concerns over railway security and passenger safety.

According to railway officials, the incident took place around 11 pm shortly after Train No. 20912 departed from Ujjain railway station for Indore. As the semi-high-speed train approached the Hari Phatak railway crossing near the Gada Puliya area, nearly 200 metres from the station, a group of unidentified persons allegedly began hurling stones at the moving train.

Passengers were left shocked as loud noises echoed through several compartments after stones struck the windows with force. Railway sources said

at least six coaches — E-1, E-2, C-6, C-7, C-8 and C-9 — sustained damage in the attack. While some windpanes were shattered completely, others developed deep cracks.

Train staff immediately alerted the Railway Protection Force (RPF) about the incident. However, considering operational safety and security protocols, the train was not stopped and continued its onward journey to Indore.

Following the incident, RPF officials launched an investigation and began scanning CCTV footage from nearby areas and railway crossings. Preliminary inputs suggest that some suspicious individuals were seen near the railway tracks around the time of the attack.

RPF Station In-Charge Narendra Yadav confirmed that a case has been registered against unidentified persons. "All angles related to the incident are being examined. CCTV footage and technical evidence are being analysed to identify those involved," he said.

## CS pulls up collectors over illegal mining, law and order lapses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary Anurag Jain on Wednesday sharply criticised district collectors over illegal mining activities and deteriorating law and order situations in parts of the state, questioning why offenders no longer fear the police and administration.

Addressing collectors and divisional commissioners through a video conference during a review meeting, Jain expressed serious concern over recent incidents in which officials were allegedly attacked by illegal miners using tractors and vehicles.

"How can anyone dare to run over officials with tractors or motorcycles? Why is there no fear of the police and administration?" the chief secretary asked, directing collectors and superin-

tendents of police to take strict action not only against drivers involved in such incidents but also against vehicle owners to send a strong message of governance and deterrence.

Jain also asked officials to intensify efforts to make Madhya Pradesh free from narcotics and drugs within the next three years through sustained enforcement drives and awareness campaigns.

Reviewing pollution levels, the chief secretary said Maihar and Singrauli were currently among the most polluted districts in the state and warned that conditions could worsen further during winter. He instructed district administrations to take preventive measures immediately.

During the meeting, Jain also reprimanded collectors of Jabalpur and Narsinghpur over rising incidents of stubble burning, saying such cases were increasing instead of declining. He directed officials to encourage farmers to use seeders instead of harvesters and expand awareness programmes to reduce crop residue burning.

The chief secretary expressed displeasure after learning that 104 government hand pumps across different districts were allegedly under private occupation. He ordered immediate action against encroachers and said access to drinking water should remain available to all citizens.

Jain also reviewed fertiliser distribution ahead of the kharif season and directed officials to ensure farmers receive fertilisers through proper registration on the e-Vikas portal. He asked authorities to issue tokens not only for DAP fertilisers but also for NPK fertilisers to

prevent overcrowding at distribution centres.

The chief secretary further instructed collectors to accelerate infrastructure repair works before the monsoon, including maintenance of bridges and culverts, and ensure proper safety signboards are installed. Referring to the recent Bargi cruise accident, he also directed district administrations to strengthen safety arrangements at reservoirs and tourist destinations to prevent mishaps and promote safe tourism activities across the state.

Jain also stressed the need for faster disposal of public grievances and warned officials against delays in resolving complaints. He said repeated complaints on the same issue reflected administrative failure and directed collectors to ensure time-bound redressal of citizen concerns.

## State eyes major healthcare digitisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla on Wednesday directed officials to strengthen the quality, transparency, accountability and efficiency of healthcare services in the state through large-scale integration of digital technology across hospitals and health institutions.

Reviewing the proposed roadmap for digital transformation of health services at the ministry, Shukla said technology should not remain limited to simplifying administrative procedures but must become a tool for ensuring timely, accessible and better treatment for patients. He instructed officials to digitally integrate services such as patient registration, medical tests, prescriptions, pharmacy distribution, hospital admissions and discharge systems to provide seamless and unified healthcare facilities.

Public Health and Medical Education Commissioner Dhanraju S presented a detailed phased action plan for the proposed digital

health transformation programme. Officials said modules related to OPD, IPD, patient vitals, prescriptions, pharmacy management, Laboratory Information System (LIS), Radiology Information System (RIS) and discharge services would gradually be connected to a common digital platform.

According to the proposed plan, development of software platforms and hospital-specific digital systems will begin along with preparation of patient journey protocols and standard medical templates. The government also plans to organise extensive training programmes and district-level orientation sessions for doctors, nurses and healthcare workers to ensure smooth implementation of the system.

Officials said demo versions of digital modules, including admission and discharge systems, would be introduced in hospitals to help doctors and nursing staff become familiar with the new technology before full-scale implementation.

The first pilot phase is proposed to begin at select medical colleges and dis-

tribut hospitals. In the next stages, the system will be expanded to other medical colleges and district hospitals across Madhya Pradesh, along with integration of laboratory and radiology services.

The state government aims to complete phased rollout of various digital healthcare modules by December.

Officials said the integrated digital health system would improve transparency, reduce delays and help patients access organised and efficient healthcare services. The system is also expected to strengthen data-based monitoring, administrative accountability and service delivery standards across government hospitals.

During the meeting, officials also presented a special preparedness plan to strengthen haemodialysis services in the state. Under the proposal, old and deteriorating dialysis equipment will be replaced in phases and new machines and facilities will be added based on requirements to improve treatment facilities for patients suffering from serious kidney diseases.



## MP cities simmer amid intense heatwave conditions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

Large parts of Madhya Pradesh continued to reel under an intense heatwave on Wednesday, with Khajuraho-Naugarh emerging as the hottest place in the state after recording a scorching 46.6 degrees Celsius. The extreme temperatures disrupted daily life across several districts, affected business activity and exposed poor public infrastructure in many towns and cities.

Datia remained among the hottest locations with 45.7 degrees Celsius, followed by Rewa at 45.4 degrees, Damoh at 45.2 degrees and Rajgarh and Tikamgarh at 45 degrees Celsius each. Satna record-

ed 44.9 degrees, while Mandla, Narsinghpur and Sheopur touched 44.6 degrees Celsius. Sagar and Raisen recorded 44.4 degrees, Malajkhand 44.2 degrees and Guna 44 degrees Celsius.

Among the state's major cities, Gwalior remained the hottest at 44.5 degrees Celsius. Bhopal recorded 43.6 degrees, Jabalpur 43 degrees, Ujjain 41.8 degrees and Indore 40.4 degrees Celsius.

The impact of the extreme heat was visible across the state. In Bhopal, roads and markets wore a deserted look during the afternoon as hot winds and intense sunlight forced people indoors. Even the city's popular shaded stretches, including the well-known "Thandi Sadak" near Shaurya

Smarak, witnessed very little movement. Two-wheeler riders were seen covering their faces and wearing full-body jackets to protect themselves from the harsh heat. Demand for summer beverages such as lemon water, soda and shikanji rose sharply across the city.

In Dewas district, the intense heat triggered a dangerous incident on the Indore-Betul highway after a chartered bus tyre burst due to high temperatures, leading to a major fire. Fortunately, no passengers were on board and the driver and helper managed to escape safely before the bus was engulfed in flames. Police personnel helped stop traffic and prevent a larger accident before fire tenders brought the blaze under control.

Tikamgarh also witnessed harsh weather conditions despite strong winds blowing at nearly 23 kilometres per hour. The dry weather and humidity levels of around 17 percent provided little relief from the scorching temperatures. Streets and markets remained largely deserted during peak afternoon hours.

In Panna, residents struggled not only with temperatures hovering between 41 and 42 degrees Celsius but also with frequent power cuts. Traders said customer footfall in markets had dropped significantly as people avoided stepping out during the day. Shopkeepers complained that the combination of extreme heat and electricity outages had severely affected normal business

activity.

The situation inside Chhatarpur district hospital highlighted the pressure on public facilities during the heatwave. Patients and their attendants complained of non-functional fans in several wards, inadequate cooling arrangements and shortage of drinking water. The hospital's water cooler had reportedly dried up, forcing people to purchase water from outside. Some attendants were even renting fans and coolers privately, spending nearly Rs 200 to Rs 300 daily for basic relief.

Despite the extreme heat, heavy crowds continued at the famous Ram Raja Temple in Orchha. Devotees carrying towels and water bottles were seen braving the scorching afternoon temperatures while visiting the temple and nearby markets.



Hindu Utsav Samiti and Sanskriti Bachao Manch activists make an appeal to celebrate Eid-ul-Zuha with eco-friendly goats during a campaign in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo



Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh pays tributes to first Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

## MP emerges as hub for medicinal plants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh has emerged as the country's leading producer of medicinal plants, driven by growing demand for herbal products and the rapid expansion of cultivation in Neemuch district's Habal Mandi, now regarded as one of Asia's largest medicinal plant markets.

Over the past few years, farmers across Neemuch and adjoining districts have increasingly shifted from traditional crops to medicinal plant cultivation due to better returns, stable prices and rising demand from ayurvedic, pharmaceutical and wellness industries. The trend has transformed Madhya Pradesh into a major centre for herbal agriculture

and medicinal plant trade in the country.

Farmers in the region are cultivating a wide range of medicinal plants, including ashwagandha, tulsi, kalonji, shatavari, safed musli, giloy and neem-based products. Traders at Habal Mandi say nearly 40 to 50 varieties of medicinal plants arrive in the market every day from different parts of Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states.

The mandi has emerged as a major trading hub attracting buyers from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and several other states. According to market estimates, medicinal plant produce worth nearly Rs 500 crore is traded annually at the market.

Spread over nearly 16 acres, the mandi handles large-scale

trading of medicinal flowers, leaves, roots, bark, seeds and herbal extracts used in ayurvedic medicines, cosmetics, nutraceuticals and herbal healthcare products. Traders say demand for raw medicinal plant material has increased sharply in recent years due to the growing popularity of herbal remedies and natural wellness products across India and abroad.

Officials said Madhya Pradesh currently cultivates medicinal plants across more than 46,000 hectares — the highest area under medicinal plant cultivation in the country. Neemuch district alone contributes nearly 20,000 to 25,000 tonnes of medicinal produce annually, making it one of the most important centres for herbal trade in India.

## Ujjain plans smart traffic network

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Ujjain

With preparations gathering pace for Simhastha 2028, authorities in Ujjain have launched an extensive plan to redesign and modernise more than 100 traffic intersections across the city to ensure smooth mobility during one of the country's largest religious congregations.

A high-level review meeting chaired by Simhastha Fair Officer Ashish Singh was held on Tuesday at the Simhastha Fair Office to assess plans related to intersection expansion, free left-turn facilities, signal systems and overall traffic management.

Officials said large-scale infrastructure upgrades are already underway as part of

the state government's long-term preparations for Simhastha 2028, which is expected to draw millions of pilgrims, saints and tourists from across India and abroad.

The administration said the traffic redesign project is being planned not only for the massive influx during Simhastha but also to strengthen Ujjain's future urban transport network. Authorities believe scientifically designed intersections, improved road geometry and dedicated free left-turn lanes will significantly reduce congestion and improve vehicular movement on key routes.

The proposed plans also include modern signage systems, advanced traffic regulation measures and improved commuter safety infrastructure.

## Daylight abduction raises fresh concerns over city policing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

A shocking daylight abduction at a busy traffic junction in Bhopal has once again raised serious questions over law and order in Madhya Pradesh's capital, especially the effectiveness of policing in crowded public areas where crimes are increasingly being carried out without fear.

The incident, captured on CCTV cameras and widely circulated on social media, shows three masked youths forcibly abducting a 27-year-old man from outside a tea stall at Prabhat Square under Ashoka Garden police station limits. Despite the dramatic struggle on a busy roadside, bystanders remained silent spectators and no one inter-

vened to stop the attackers.

Police identified the victim as Karan, a resident of the Industrial Area. Investigators said the accused targeted him over a personal dispute linked to his live-in partner. According to police, some youths were allegedly in contact with the woman, which Karan had objected to. A heated argument had reportedly taken place between Karan and one of the accused a day before the abduction.

On Sunday afternoon, the accused allegedly arrived in a speeding car, confronted Karan near the tea stall and forcibly dragged him into the vehicle before fleeing. Eyewitnesses said the victim repeatedly tried to resist and free himself, but the attackers overpowered him within

minutes.

Police later found that Karan was taken to another location in the Industrial Area where he was allegedly assaulted and held captive for some time. The entire sequence has exposed glaring concerns over the confidence with which criminals are operating in the state capital, even in broad daylight and in crowded public spaces. The incident has also intensified criticism of Bhopal's policing and emergency response systems. Questions are being raised over the absence of immediate police presence in a busy urban zone and the growing sense of insecurity among residents. Civic groups and local residents say incidents of street violence, assault and intimidation have become more frequent in several parts of the city.

Following information from passersby, Ashoka Garden police reached the spot and began scanning CCTV footage from nearby establishments. Investigators later recovered clear visuals showing the masked youths forcing the victim into the car.

Police have identified the vehicle used in the crime as being registered in the name of Ajay Chouksey. Officials are now questioning the vehicle owner and examining location data, CCTV movements and call records to identify all those involved. Senior police officials said raids are underway to trace the accused. However, the incident has already triggered wider debate over deteriorating public safety and the increasing boldness of criminals in Madhya Pradesh's capital city.

## MP pushes worker safety campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Indore

The Madhya Pradesh Labour Department has launched a new initiative encouraging citizens to act as "Shram Prahari" to help identify unregistered factories and construction sites.

Officials said the move aims to ensure workers receive social security benefits and safe working conditions under labour welfare schemes. Citizens can verify registered establishments on the department's official portal and report unregistered sites through the toll-free helpline 1800-233-8888. Authorities said strict legal action will be taken against violators based on verified public complaints.

## Husband sent to CBI custody in Twisha case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

The investigation into actress Twisha Sharma's mysterious death intensified on Wednesday after the CBI secured custody of her husband, Samarth Singh, and took him to the family's Katara Hills residence in Bhopal to reconstruct the events surrounding the incident. A local court remanded Samarth to CBI custody till May 29.

Twisha had died under suspicious circumstances on the night of May 12. While her in-laws have claimed it was a case of suicide, her family has alleged murder and accused her husband and in-laws of destroying evidence and influencing the investigation.

The case took another significant turn as the Madhya Pradesh High Court heard a petition seeking cancellation of

anticipatory bail granted to Twisha's mother-in-law, retired judge Giribala Singh. After hearing arguments from all sides, the court reserved its order and also made the CBI a party in the proceedings.

During the hearing, Advocate General Prashant Singh accused the family of repeatedly avoiding the investigation despite notices being issued. He argued that the accused initially refused to accept notices and later had to be contacted through WhatsApp. The prosecution also questioned how anticipatory bail was granted within an hour of the FIR being registered in such a serious case.

The state government further argued that the accused continued to stay in the same house where the incident took place between May 12 and May 15, raising concerns about possible tampering with evidence and the crime scene.

## Admin seals hotels over violations

**Neemuch:** In a major enforcement drive against violations of public safety and hygiene norms, a joint administrative team conducted surprise inspections at private hospitals, hotels and commercial establishments in Manasa town of Neemuch district on Wednesday. The action was carried out on the directions of District Collector Himanshu Chandra.

The inspection team, led by Manasa SDM Kiran Anjana, included officials from the tehsil administration, municipal council, public works department, electricity board and fire safety department. During the drive, authori-

ties found multiple violations related to hygiene, food safety, licensing and fire safety standards, prompting immediate action against several establishments.

Ganpat Hotel was sealed after officials discovered extremely unhygienic conditions and poor sanitation on the premises. Authorities also collected samples of mawa for quality testing.

At Balu Hotel, the administration found illegal mawa manufacturing activities allegedly being carried out without a valid licence. Officials imposed an on-the-spot penalty of Rs 5,100 and sealed the establishment.

## Metro corridor work to affect homes, shops

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bhopal

Several houses and commercial establishments will be removed in Bhopal's Roshanpura and Malviya Nagar areas for construction of the city's Metro rail line. A detailed survey and marking exercise has already been completed, with officials identifying buildings that fall within the alignment and safety zone of the project.

According to the report, work on the Metro corridor is expected to begin within a month. Notices have been issued to affected property owners, asking them to vacate the

premises. Many residents and traders have expressed concern over displacement and loss of business.

The biggest impact is likely in Roshanpura, where around 25 shops are expected to be demolished. In Malviya Nagar, nearly 15 shops and several residential structures may also be affected. Authorities said compensation and rehabilitation measures are being processed as per rules.

In Jahangirabad and nearby residential areas, locals are worried as nearly 600 metres of the proposed stretch passes through densely populated zones. The alignment includes commercial buildings and

shops located close to the road. Officials said some structures are within 20 metres of the rail line and fall under mandatory clearance norms.

District administration and municipal corporation teams have begun the process of removing encroachments and unsafe structures. Police deployment has also been planned during demolition activity to maintain law and order.

Officials said the Metro project is crucial for improving urban transport and reducing traffic congestion in Bhopal. However, affected residents have demanded fair compensation and proper relocation before demolition work begins.

## MP adopts Gujarat model for advanced food laboratories

UMESH NIGAM  
Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh is preparing for a major transformation in its food and drug testing infrastructure by adopting the "Gujarat model" — a nationally acclaimed framework known for advanced laboratories, rapid testing mechanisms and strong scientific enforcement systems.

The initiative is expected to significantly improve the state's ability to detect food adulteration, counterfeit medicines and unsafe consumables while strengthening public health surveillance.

The move comes after a detailed study by officials of Madhya Pradesh's Food and Drug Administration department, who recently visited Gujarat to examine its laboratory network, technical

systems and regulatory framework. Gujarat has emerged as one of India's leading states in food and drug quality monitoring due to its investment in high-end technology, trained manpower and decentralised testing infrastructure. Inspired by this success, Madhya Pradesh has now begun implementing a similar model across the state.

Under the ambitious plan, high-tech food and drug laboratories will be developed in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior. In addition, divisional laboratories are proposed in Ujjain and Rewa to improve regional access to scientific testing facilities. Officials believe the expansion will reduce delays in sample examination and increase the state's capacity to tackle cases related to adulteration, contamination

and substandard medicines. The upgraded laboratories will be equipped with cutting-edge technologies such as GC-MS/MS and LC-MS/MS systems, which are widely used for advanced chemical analysis and detection of harmful substances. These machines can identify pesticide residues, toxic chemicals, synthetic adulterants and pharmaceutical impurities with high precision. Authorities say the use of such modern technology will strengthen legal evidence in prosecutions and improve the accuracy of investigations.

The government's push for modernisation comes at a time when concerns over adulterated food products and fake medicines are growing across the country. From contaminated edible oils and synthetic milk prod-

ucts to spurious medicines, regulatory agencies are increasingly under pressure to ensure stronger quality checks. Officials say the Gujarat-inspired laboratory network will help create a more efficient surveillance system capable of faster sample testing and scientific verification.

Among the key projects, a modern five-storey food testing laboratory is being constructed in Indore at a cost exceeding Rs 8 crore. The facility is expected to test nearly 20,000 samples annually and will serve as one of the state's most advanced centres for food analysis. In Jabalpur, construction of a divisional laboratory building is nearing completion, while in Rewa, land has been identified for a new regional laboratory. The Ujjain facility is also expected to be devel-

oped on similar lines with high-tech infrastructure.

Bhopal's State Food Testing Laboratory will undergo major expansion as part of the modernisation drive. New analytical equipment, microbiology testing systems and atomic absorption spectrometry machines are likely to be installed to enhance testing capabilities. Officials say the objective is to create a state-wide network of laboratories capable of handling increasing sample loads with greater scientific reliability.

The initiative also reflects a broader policy shift towards evidence-based governance and scientific regulation. By replicating Gujarat's model, Madhya Pradesh aims to establish a uniform, transparent and technology-driven enforcement system.

Name of Borrower(s)/Mortgagor(s)/Guarantor(s)		Description of Property of Borrower	Reserve Price EMD	Outstanding Amount as per Demand notice
<b>Union Bank of India, VIDISHA Branch NO.5 &amp; 6, Arihant Vihar Road, Vidisha, DIST VIDISHA - 464001 (MP)</b>				
<b>Borrowers:</b> M/s Shree Satya Sai Traders Prop. Amit Sharma S/o Shri Harinarayan Sharma R/o Banskull, Near Ganesh Mandir, Vidisha (M.P.) 464001 Guarantor: Smt. Shyam Lata W/o Harinarayan Sharma R/o H. No. 19, Ward No. 6, Balaji Marg, Kartik Chowk, Kile Anderr, Vidisha (M.P.) 464001		<b>All that part of the property consisting of land measuring of 1036 sq. ft. Situated in House No. old 133, Ward No. old-06, New Ward No.16, Kartik Chouk, Kileander, Dist. Vidisha (M.P.) Owner: Smt. Shyamla Sharma W/o Harinarayan Sharma (Guarantor)</b> Property ID - UB18BH0BHC5161	<b>₹ 4,95,360.00</b> 10% of the Reserve Price Symbolic Possession	<b>₹ 3,34,668.00</b> as per demand notice dated 01.01.2020 + Interest & Other charges
<b>Sallaiya Branch Ganpati Bhawan, Opp. Aakrati Green Complex, Village Sallaiya - Post Bawadiyakala, Bhopal</b>				
<b>Borrowers:</b> Mr. Yogesh Dwivedi S/o Late Brahaspati Prasad Dwivedi & Mrs. Vimla Dwivedi W/o S/o Late Brahaspati Prasad Dwivedi Address of all: Dk 3 207 KD Tower Danish Kunj Kolar, Gehun Kheda Bhopal M.P. 462003		<b>All the piece and parcel of Property Residential 2 BHK Flat No. TF-01 on Third Floor K.D. Tower-2, Plot No. 207, D.K.-3 Sector, part of Khasra No. 19/1,19/2, 19/3,19/5, 22/1,22/2, 22/3,29,31,32,34,35/1, 35/2, 35/3 and 40/1 situated at Danish Kunj colony (danish grah nirman sahkari samiti Maryadi), Ward No. 82, Village Banjari, Kolar Road, Bhopal M.P. admeasuring super built-up area 75.27 Sq.Mt. or 810 Sq. Ft. Owners: Mrs. Vimla Devi And Mr. Yogesh Dwivedi, Boundaries: East: - Flat no. TF-02, West: - Open Below Road, North: - Plot No. DK 3/206, South: - Open to SKY.</b> Property ID - UB18BH0BHC6534	<b>₹ 18,58,950/-</b> 10% of the Reserve Price Symbolic Possession	<b>₹ 13,71,123.11</b> as per demand notice dated 26.02.2026 + Interest & Other charges
<b>Union bank of India, Maksi Branch Maksi</b>				
<b>Borrowers:</b> Mr. Neeraj Meena S/o Dinesh Meena House No 43/5, Ward No 06 AB Road Purvi Bhag, Maksi Tehsil & Distt. Shajapur (M.P.) 465106		<b>All the pieces and parcel of Residential House admeasuring 840 Sq. Ft. situated at Survey No. 898/8 Ward No. 04 under Subhash Chandra ward post Ukala Road, Jagannath Puri Main Road Maksi Tehsil and Zila Shajapur M.P. 465106 Owner: Mr. Neeraj Meena S/o Dinesh Meena Boundaries: North: House of Bane Singh, South: House of Sohan Lal, East: 20 ft. wide Common Road, West: Land of Mr. Sawe Singh</b> Property ID - UB18BH0BHC3226	<b>₹ 15,30,000/-</b> 10% of the Reserve Price Symbolic Possession	<b>₹ 14,03,202.68</b> as per demand notice dated 21.07.2025 + Interest & Other charges
<b>Date and Time of e-auction: 14-07-2026, 12:00 noon to 5:00 P.M. (With 10 minutes unlimited auto extension)</b>				
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in Union Bank of India Secured Creditor's website i.e. <a href="https://www.unionbankofindia.bank.in/auction-property/viewauction-property.aspx">https://www.unionbankofindia.bank.in/auction-property/viewauction-property.aspx</a> & <a href="https://baanknet.com">https://baanknet.com</a> For Registration and Login and bidding Rules visit <a href="https://baanknet.com">https://baanknet.com</a> Date: 27.05.2026, Place: Bhopal				
				Authorised Officer, Union Bank of India



## IN FOCUS



Otters are seen at Sarthana Nature Park on the occasion of World Otter Day in Surat, Gujarat

# Union Govt approves major ED restructuring plan

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH  
New Delhi

The Centre has approved a substantial reorganisation of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), including an expansion of its workforce across various cadres, in a significant development aimed at enhancing the agency's operational capabilities. This decision, authorised by a sanction order issued by the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance, seeks to bolster the ED's capacity to effectively manage the growing number of cases related to money laundering and economic offences.

The most notable changes are within the executive cadre. The number of additional directors of enforcement has more than doubled from 10 to 24, while the number of joint directors will increase from 28 to 49.

Deputy Directors will rise from 148 to 267, and Assistant Directors from 255 to 531. Enforcement officers will see an increase from 355



to 606, and assistant enforcement officers from 425 to 803. The positions of director and special director remain unchanged at one and seven, respectively.

The legal cadre has also experienced significant growth. The number of additional directors (prosecution) has increased from one to seven, deputy legal advisers from seven to eighteen, and assistant legal advisers from eighteen to thirty-six. Additionally, a new adjudication wing is being established to expedite proceedings under the Prevention of Money Laundering

Act (PMLA). This wing will include two additional directors (adjudication), three joint directors, five deputy directors, and ten assistant directors. The position of Special Director (Adjudication) is retained at one.

Within the system's cadre, the position of system analyst remains, now placed at a higher pay level. The number of scientific technical assistants remains at eleven, with an upgraded pay scale. The ministerial cadre will see the creation of a new post of internal financial advisor. Assistant Directors (Official

Language) will increase from three to six, Superintendents from twenty to thirty, and Assistants from fifty-seven to sixty-five. Other ministerial positions, such as senior translators, upper division clerks, and lower division clerks, will remain unchanged. In the security cadre, the number of senior sepoy will increase from 209 to 273, while the number of sepoy remains at 70.

Among support staff, senior private secretaries will rise from one to four, and stenographer grade-I posts will increase from twenty to forty-four. The number of private secretaries, stenographers grade II, drivers, and multitasking staff remains largely unchanged.

The expenditure for the expanded cadre will be financed by Enforcement, with approval from the competent authority. Senior officials have stated that the notable increases—particularly at the deputy director, assistant director, and enforcement officer levels—will enable the agency to process a larger volume of cases

concurrently, reduce delays in investigations and prosecutions, and facilitate faster filings of charges and more rapid progress in high-profile cases.

The expansion of the legal cadre, including additional prosecution directors and legal advisers, is expected to strengthen the ED's courtroom presence, improve conviction rates, and enhance overall legal efficiency.

Furthermore, the creation of the adjudication wing will expedite the resolution of pending PMLA cases, resulting in faster property attachments and penalties. The increase in ministerial and support staff will streamline administrative processes and internal coordination, allowing investigators to focus more intently on enforcement activities. This move by the Government comes at a time when investigations into financial crimes and money laundering are rising steadily, underscoring the need for an expanded workforce to ensure timely and effective enforcement.

## UP's CBN unit seizes 8,800 narcotics tablets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh unit of the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) has seized 8,800 NRx tablets and 1,269 bottles of Codeine Phosphate syrup, and arrested one person during an operation near Haryana's Sonipat, officials said on Wednesday.

Deputy Narcotics Commissioner Praveen Bali told PTI that the operation was conducted on Tuesday jointly by officers of the Bareilly Division of the UP

unit of CBN and the Delhi Cell of CBN Headquarters, Gwalior, under the Centre's "Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan". Acting on specific intelligence inputs, the CBN team intercepted a car on the Meerut-Kharkhoda highway near Sonipat and apprehended a person allegedly transporting narcotic prescription medicines without valid documentation, Bali said. During the search, officials recovered 2,600 tablets of Clonazepam, 6,200 tablets of Tramadol and 1,269 bottles of Codeine from the vehicle, he said.

## Chennithala rejects BJP tie-up claim over ED raids

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala on Wednesday denied allegations that the ED searches at residences linked to Marxist veteran Pinarayi Vijayan were part of a "Congress-BJP operation," and claimed instead that the CPI(M) had an understanding with the saffron party.

His cabinet colleague, K Muraleedharan, said the party does not trust the Enforcement Directorate and does not take its investigations seriously. "So, let the searches go on," he told



reporters. Chennithala, speaking to reporters, said the CPI(M) has to explain "why its bond with the BJP had failed", leading to the ED action. He also rejected the CPI(M) claim that the

raids followed a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister VD Satheesan a day earlier. The minister said a meeting between the PM and the Kerala CM was necessary for the state and part of routine Government work. "Pinarayi Vijayan met the PM so many times when he was CM," he pointed out, adding there was no need to connect the meeting with the searches.

Chennithala termed the CPI(M) allegation that the searches were an outcome of an arrangement between the Congress and BJP a "fixed refrain." "There is no

need for that. Everyone knows what the Congress, BJP and CPI(M) stand for. All I want to ask is what happened to the people who entered into partnerships. They—the CPI(M) and BJP—had a partnership. The biggest connection was between them. They need to tell people how that partnership ended and why," he claimed.

Later, Muraleedharan said the Congress does not agree with everything the ED does. "We have no links with the ED. Now that we are in power, I am sure the ED will enter the secretariat as well. We do not trust the agency,

and we do not take its investigations seriously," he said. On CPI(M) workers and activists taking to the streets to protest against the searches, he said it was not out of love for the former Kerala CM.

"Now that all departments, including the police, are under us, it is a good opportunity for them to damage Government property in the name of protests. Otherwise, why would someone throw stones at a police vehicle over the NEET issue, on which both the Government and the opposition hold the same view?" he asked.

## Jagan ramps up attack on Naidu Government



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Amaravati

YSRCP supremo Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday announced a statewide protest campaign titled "Two Years of Backstabbing" against the N Chandrababu Naidu-led coalition Government in Andhra Pradesh.

The protest campaign will be held from June 4 to June 12. Jagan alleged that the Government had failed to fulfil its election promises and had betrayed the trust placed in it by the people.

"This statewide programme from June 4 to June 12 is intended to place before people what we see as two years of broken assurances and expose the Government's failure to act on commitments made during the elections," Jagan said while addressing party leaders at the party's central office in Tadepalli.

The former CM said the agitation would commence on June 4 at mandal headquarters across Andhra Pradesh, where party leaders and workers would display election-time commitments, guarantees and public pledges made by the ruling alliance and burn copies of them as a symbolic mark of protest.

## Sri Ganganagar hottest at 48.2 degrees Celsius, as heatwave grips north India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Northern India continued to sizzle under blistering heat on Wednesday, with Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar recording the highest temperature in the country at 48.2 degrees Celsius, according to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD classifies a heatwave in the plains if the maximum temperature exceeds 45 degrees, while temperatures above 47 degrees are categorised as a severe heatwave.

Sri Ganganagar's recorded temperature was 5.5 notches above normal, while several other regions in the desert state witnessed mercury hovering around 46-47 degrees Celsius. Pilani was the second hottest place in the state at 47 degrees Celsius,



Woman covering herself while walking amid heatwave at the Sangam in Prayagraj

followed by Bikaner at 46.6 degrees, Chiru and Jaisalmer at 46.4 degrees each, Phalodi at 46.2 degrees, and Kota at 45.4 degrees.

In Uttar Pradesh, Banda district emerged as the hottest place in the state at 47.8 degrees Celsius, fol-

lowed by Prayagraj at 46.4 degrees, Jhansi at 46 degrees, Orai at 45.6 degrees, Kanpur (IAF) at 45.2 degrees and Deomali at 45.1 degrees.

Temperatures in neighbouring Delhi, Haryana and Chandigarh also hovered between 45 and 46 degrees

Celsius. Maharashtra's Vidarbha region witnessed marginal relief compared to previous day, although temperatures continued to remain around 45 degrees Celsius. Brahmapuri, which has been registering record-breaking temperatures, saw

the mercury settle at 46 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, the meteorological centre in Dehradun issued an orange alert for several districts in Uttarakhand, forecasting heavy rain, thunderstorms, hailstorms, and squalls over the next few days.

According to the weather forecast, an orange alert is in place for May 28 for Uttarkashi, Rudrapur, Chamoli, Bageshwar and Pithoragarh districts. These areas are likely to experience thunderstorms accompanied by lightning, hailstorms, and gusty winds reaching speeds of 40 to 50 kmph, gusting up to 60 kmph.

The remaining districts of the state are also expected to witness isolated thunderstorms, lightning, and winds blowing at 40 to 50 kmph.

### NAGPUR DEATHS: COPS SAY EXTREME TEMPERATURE MAY BE CULPRIT

**Nagpur:** Amid scorching summer in Nagpur, where the temperature has crossed 46 degrees Celsius, the deaths of 17 people in the last three days at various places, including five at the railway station on Wednesday, are under scrutiny, with police suspecting heat exposure as the likely cause. The deceased include persons found near station premises, on roadsides, beneath flyovers, near markets, gardens and public spaces. Most of them appeared to be homeless or living in vulnerable conditions, according to police. Police suspect that extreme heat and prolonged exposure may have contributed to

several of the fatalities. "Many victims appeared to be homeless or travelling in difficult conditions. The medical reports will confirm the exact causes behind fatalities, but heat exposure is suspected in many cases," a senior Nagpur Police officer said. Police have registered accidental death cases in all incidents and are awaiting post-mortem reports to determine the exact causes of death. On May 24, three unidentified men were found unconscious in Pachpaoli, Imamwada and Hudkeshwar areas of Nagpur city. Another body was recovered from a garden near the Aradhana bus stop in Wathoda. (PTI)

## FROM PAGE - 1

### Siddaramaiah set to exit

Senior Congress MLA and Chairperson of the Administrative Reforms Commission in the State RV Deshpande confirmed that Siddaramaiah had decided to resign. The former minister, who met Siddaramaiah at his residence, said that when some MLAs insisted he should not resign, the CM replied that he had given his word to the high command and would respect it.

"I was with the CM. He said, 'I have decided to resign.' I did not question him about why he was resigning. We tried to persuade him to continue," Deshpande said.

On Wednesday, supporters of Siddaramaiah gathered outside his official residence protesting amid intense speculation that he may step down. Police deployed outside his official residence, Kaveri, whisked away the protesters in buses as they shouted slogans.

Supporters accused Congress high command of engineering a crisis, pointing out that the party's dominance in Karnataka rests on Siddaramaiah and his support base. They also raised slogans against the Congress leadership, expressing displeasure over the move for a CM change. AICC General Secretary in charge of the State, Randeep Singh Surjewala, urged the media not to speculate on the issue. He said the Congress is capable of deciding its leadership matters and would inform the public whenever any decision is taken.

### ED raids on Pinarayi trigger protests

The raids were carried out while eight central security personnel guarded the premises. Hearing about the raids at the CPI(M) veteran's residence, party workers and activists from its allied organisations gathered outside Vijayan's rented house and staged a protest.

As the ED officials and central security personnel who took part in the raid left his home, the situation escalated, with protesters surrounding and blocking their hired vehicles and throwing stones and bricks at them, badly damaging the

windshields, other windows and exterior rear-view mirrors. The large number of protesters, shouting slogans against the ED and the Centre, kicked the vehicles, banged their fists and sticks on the windows and windshields, and even threw rotten eggs at them.

One of the drivers of the vehicles sustained an injury. The ED officials then went to the Thampanoor police station to lodge a complaint against the protesters. Police and central security personnel struggled to control the crowd as the vehicles, which also had a female official on board, were targeted during the incident. Later, Police arrested for CPI(M) workers for attacking the ED officials.

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala said that the Home Department and the Kerala Police had no prior information about the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raid. "We were not informed, and police assistance was not sought. The ED used central forces to carry out the raids," he said.

The BJP strongly condemned the attack on ED officials, calling it an assault on the rule of law. In a post on X, BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar said, "Violence is the last refuge of the corrupt." Attacking officials on duty and obstructing an investigation is not a political protest. It is an assault on the rule of law, the BJP MLA said. He alleged, "As usual, the Congress-led state Government is keeping quiet to protect its political twin, the CPI(M).

He further added that the BJP-NDA would ensure that the investigation is not derailed.

Earlier, angry CPI(M) workers hurled helmets, plastic bottles and stones at security personnel deployed outside Vijayan's house while ED searches were underway inside.

Vijayan alleged that the ED searches at his premises were part of a targeted crackdown on opposition leaders across the country. Speaking to reporters after ED officials concluded hours-long searches at his house at Bakery Junction, Vijayan said such actions would not weaken him or the CPI(M).

"This is only the beginning. Nobody should harbour the illusion that such actions can intimidate or weaken us," he said.

The veteran CPI(M) leader alleged that the BJP-led Centre has been using central agencies

against opposition leaders since it came to power, and claimed that the action against him was also part of that strategy.

The ED carried out the raids a day after the Kerala High Court dismissed a petition filed by Cochin Minerals and Rutile Limited and its top officials challenging an Enforcement Directorate (ED) money laundering probe linked to alleged financial irregularities involving Vijayan's daughter, Veena T, and her software firm Exalogic Solutions.

In a judgment delivered on May 26, Justice T R Ravi ruled that the ED was legally empowered to continue its investigation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), even before the filing of a formal FIR or final report by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO).

The company had approached the court seeking to quash the ED's Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR), summons issued to its officials, and related proceedings. It argued that the ED lacked jurisdiction because no scheduled offence existed when the probe began. The case traces back to Income Tax raids conducted in January 2019 at the company's offices and the residences of senior executives. Later, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs ordered an SFIO investigation into the company's affairs following a complaint filed by BJP leader Shone George. During the hearing, the ED informed the court that the SFIO had since filed a complaint in April 2025 alleging offences under the Companies Act, including fraud provisions that qualify as scheduled offences under the PMLA.

As the raids were progressing at various locations, CPI(M) leaders and workers held protest marches in various districts across the state. CPI(M) leader K N Balagopal alleged that the ED's "politically motivated witch-hunt targeting Comrade Vijayan" was part of a broader political agenda aimed at weakening the CPI(M) and the Left.

Responding to the CPI(M)'s charge, BJP leader V Muraleedharan said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "better things to do" than strike any deal with the Congress to target the CPI(M), which he said had limited national presence.

### Govt pushes AI to power PDS

State Governments were facing difficulties in bearing the transportation cost of foodgrain to PDS shops.

This cost will be supported under the scheme wherein FPS dealers' remuneration will also be enhanced, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters after the Cabinet meeting.

"Right from selection of beneficiaries to movement of foodgrains, to getting proactive feedback from citizens, to reducing transportation distance — all those activities have been approved," Vaishnaw added.

SARTHAK-PDS merges two existing programmes — assistance for intra-State foodgrain movement and FPS dealer margins and the SMART-PDS modernisation scheme — into a single scheme to curb leakages.

The scheme will deploy AI to weed out duplicate and ghost beneficiaries, forecast demand, track vehicles, optimise routes and handle grievance redressal.

Under the new scheme, the Government projects logistics cost reductions of 15-50 per cent from the scheme, with annual savings of Rs 280 crore and a 36 per cent reduction in carbon emissions from shorter transport routes.

The scheme further plans deployment of Machine Learning (ML), Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Blockchain to modernise PDS operations. Key deliverables include standardised architectures and unified databases for real-time monitoring, analytics systems, and State Command Control Centres for data-driven oversight. ISO-certified process frameworks will also be put in place to ensure transparency, security and operational sustainability.

"The Government has a commitment to the people of the nation — a dignified life by ensuring access to food and nutritional security through the availability of adequate quantities of quality foodgrains," read a Government release. Vaishnaw was categorical that SARTHAK-PDS does not replace the existing PDS architecture but is designed to bring structural reform

across the delivery of foodgrains, logistics, transportation, material handling and grievance redressal.

### SC rejects challenge to SIR

"We are equally satisfied that, in its object and design, the impugned SIR bears a direct nexus to the constitutional goal of a free and fair election. Free and fair elections do not rest merely upon the mechanics of polling. They equally depend upon the integrity, accuracy and purity of the electoral roll which forms the foundation of the democratic process," the court said.

The bench also made it clear that Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship, justifying the ECI stand to not treat it as a primary document to establish statutory eligibility for voting. The court reaffirmed its earlier order and directed the ECI to treat Aadhaar as an "additional 12th document" for identity verification in Bihar's revised rolls.

The bench separately dealt with the validity of the documentation regime prescribed by the Commission as part of the enumeration process. The verdict said the ECI was entitled to classify documents on the basis of their evidentiary value in establishing statutory conditions such as residence and eligibility. The verdict said the choice of proposed documents for verification of electoral rolls and their evidentiary standards necessarily falls within the discretionary domain of the Commission which may not be substituted subject to reasonableness. The bench noted that unlike a passport or a birth certificate, a ration card is not "conclusive proof of citizenship" and is often susceptible to misuse. The court had framed the SIR challenge into four questions. First, whether the SIR was consistent with the constitutional and statutory mandate of the ECI? Second, if the means adopted by the ECI bear a reasonable nexus with the objectives sought to be achieved? Third, whether the measures undertaken were necessary and no other alternative existed? Fourth, whether a fair balance has been maintained between the importance of achieving the stated objective and the limitation imposed upon constitutional rights.



## PM Modi urges citizens to take precautions amid heatwave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

'Nautapa (nine-day intense heat period) unrelenting fury across vast swathes of the country has prompted Prime Minister Narendra Modi to appeal to the citizens to take all precautions and take care of the elderly and children. It is the first time a prime minister has reached out to the people battling the vagaries of the weather. The seriousness of the situation also figured in the cabinet meeting here on Wednesday, with the prime minister directing the union ministers to ensure that their respective ministries and departments take necessary steps to mitigate the impact of the prevailing heat wave conditions.

In a series of posts on X, the prime minister said that children, the elderly and those working outdoors are especially vulnerable to extreme heat, and no one should ignore the warning signs of



heat exhaustion, as it can quickly turn dangerous and may even lead to heatstroke. "Different parts of India are witnessing soaring temperatures and the challenges that come with it. This heat is harsh on all of us, and I urge you all to take as many precautions as possible," he said.

Modi urged everyone to stay hydrated, carry water whenever stepping out and also offer a glass of water to others, as such kindness goes

a long way in such weather. "Watch for signs of heat exhaustion like dizziness, nausea or extreme fatigue. If someone around you feels unwell, weak or develops a headache, it is best to help move them to a cool and shaded place immediately," he said.

Modi also urged citizens to help those affected by the heat and ensure that they get water, ORS, etc., which give them relief. "In such weather, timely care and attention go

a long way," he said. The prime minister also urged the citizens to call and check on elderly parents, grandparents and loved ones whenever possible during the heatwave. "Remind them to stay hydrated, avoid stepping out in peak afternoon hours and take rest whenever possible," he said.

Modi also appealed to people to remember birds and animals amid the harsh weather. "In this extreme heat, let us also remember the birds and animals around us. A small bowl of water kept outside your home, balconies, terraces, shops or offices can become a lifeline for a thirsty bird. May compassion guide us in these difficult days," he said.

After that, at the Cabinet meeting, PM Modi directed all Union Cabinet ministers to ensure that their respective ministries and departments take necessary steps to mitigate the impact of the prevailing heatwave conditions across the country.

## SC verdict on SIR raises more questions than answers: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Congress on Wednesday said that although the Supreme Court acknowledged the constitutional validity of the SIR (Special Intensive Revision) of electoral rolls, its verdict raised more questions than it answered.

The Congress disagreed with the verdict and said legal sanction could confer prima facie legitimacy to the SIR, but it could not cure the "malice in implementation".

Congress senior spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said the issue was always a matter of substance and intent but never of form, and the party had questioned the mode, manner, timing and style in which it was carried out by the Election Commission.

"The Supreme Court has indeed acknowledged the constitutional validity of SIR, but in giving as many answers as the apex court has, it has



Congress senior spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi

also raised just as many questions," he told reporters at a press conference.

Singhvi raised several shortcomings on the part of the Election Commission in conducting the exercise, which were challenged in the Supreme Court, and lamented that it was unfortunate that the Supreme Court made no comments on them.

"The SIR is always a matter of substance, never merely a matter of form. The issue was never about the power to conduct SIR. What was being questioned was the mode, manner, timing, and style in which it was being carried out," he said.

## Nation Focus



### PM, CONGRESS PAY TRIBUTE TO NEHRU ON DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leaders on Wednesday paid tributes to former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on his 62nd death anniversary. "Paying homage to former Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary," Modi said in a social media post.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi paid floral tributes to Nehru at his memorial at Shanti Van.

In a social media post in Hindi, Rahul Gandhi said, "A humble tribute to the country's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on his death anniversary. Laying the strong foundations of modern India, he dedicated his entire life to building an inclusive, harmonious, and progressive nation." (PTI)



### PRADHAN, K RADHAKRISHNAN ASSESS NEET-UG READINESS

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Wednesday held a meeting with former ISRO chairman K Radhakrishnan to assess preparedness for the NEET-UG 2026 re-exam, scheduled to be held on June 21.

Radhakrishnan is also chairman of a high-powered steering committee, which is tasked with monitoring implementation of recommendations on the National Testing Agency (NTA), according to an official statement. Pradhan and Radhakrishnan reviewed measures being taken to strengthen examination security and surveillance systems. (PTI)

## 1,150 cr cocaine seized off Mundra coast; 3 held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Ahmedabad/New Delhi

In one of the biggest drug hauls in recent times, 115 kg of cocaine worth over 1,150 crores was seized in a joint operation by the Gujarat police and the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), officials said on Wednesday.

They said an international trafficking network was busted during the operation on May 25-26, and the contraband was recovered from a vessel off the Mundra port. Three foreign nationals were also apprehended, officials said. Giving details, they said

ed from the national capital's Dwarka area two other foreign nationals who were supposed to take the delivery, he said. Search was on for another suspect, also a Tanzanian national, who jumped into the sea during the operation, the DGP added.

GPS devices, satellite communication equipment and AirTags were also seized from the consignment bags, indicating the contraband may have been electronically tracked during transit, officials said.

The Anti-Terrorist Squad and the Coast Guard jointly carried out the operation following specific intelligence

## CBI arrests two more in NEET-UG paper leak case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has apprehended two additional individuals in connection with the NEET-UG 2026 question paper leak, increasing the total number of arrests to thirteen, the agency announced on Wednesday. Among those detained is Dr Manoj Shirure, a physician based in Latur, who allegedly assisted three students, including the son of a coaching centre proprietor, in obtaining Chemistry questions from the accused, PV Kulkarni. The other individual detained is Tejas Harshadkumar Shah, a



Physics instructor at Dr Abhang Prabhu Medical Academy in Pune, who is alleged to have procured the leaked Physics questions from the accused, Manisha Havaldar.

The investigation into the sequence of events and the

conspiracy underlying this case remains ongoing. The CBI has conducted searches at 49 locations across various regions and has seized multiple incriminating documents, laptops, and mobile phones. These items are currently being

analysed in detail. The investigation was initiated on May 12, 2026, following a written complaint from the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, concerning the alleged breach of the NEET-UG 2026 examination questions. In response, the CBI formed special teams, conducted searches nationwide, and arrested and interrogated numerous suspects.

To date, the agency has arrested thirteen suspects from Delhi, Jaipur, Gurugram, Nasik, Pune, Latur, and Ahliyanagar. The investigation continues, with various specialised teams working concurrently.

## US bound Air India flight returns; 22% domestic flights cut

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

After being airborne for nine hours, a San Francisco-bound Air India plane, carrying around 230 passengers, returned to the national Capital due to a technical issue on Wednesday. The wide-body aircraft's (VT ALL) traffic collision avoidance system (TCAS) was not working properly.

The aircraft, which had left Delhi at 3.09 am, returned to Indira Gandhi International Airport just after noon. A B777 burns about 8-9 tonnes of fuel every hour, depending on wind flows and other factors.

At a time when oil prices are on fire, and the rupee touches new life lows on a daily basis, this was one technical snag the loss-making airline could have done without.

According to data available on the flight-tracking website FlightRadar24, the aircraft remained airborne for nine hours. The plane reportedly began diverting back to Delhi after flying for over three hours while passing through Chinese



airspace. In a statement, the airline said: "AI 173 from Delhi to San Francisco on May 27 has returned to Delhi due to a technical issue in accordance with the laid down procedures. The aircraft landed safely and will undergo technical inspection in line with Air India's safety standards".

"We regret the inconvenience caused to the passengers and are making alternative arrangements to fly them to their destination as soon as possible... our ground teams are providing

all necessary assistance to the passengers, including refreshments, hotel accommodation or rescheduling as opted by them. The safety and well-being of passengers and crew remain Air India's highest priority," the airline said.

In another development, Air India has temporarily cut 22 per cent of its domestic flights as the loss-making airline grapples with the impact of the high fuel prices.

The decision comes two weeks after the Tata Group-

owned airline announced a 27 per cent reduction in international flights amid airspace curbs, as well as costlier jet fuel, which have pushed the operational costs higher for overseas sectors.

Air India operates around 4,400 weekly flights. Out of them, about 3,600 are domestic, and 800 are international services.

"In continuation of our previously announced adjustments to select international services between June and August 2026, we have temporarily rationalised operations on certain domestic routes during the same period, with a reduction in frequencies on select routes," Air India said in a statement on Wednesday. The sources said 20-22 per cent of the domestic flights would be reduced.

Based on around 3,600 weekly domestic flights, the 22 per cent cut would result in a reduction of more than 790 weekly services.

The airline said these adjustments are driven by the sustained impact of high fuel prices on overall operations.

## CPI opposes panel on demographic shift, terms it divisive



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Wednesday strongly condemned the Union Government's decision to constitute a high-level committee to examine alleged "unnatural demographic changes" in the country. Terming the move a dangerous attempt by the BJP-led regime to deepen communal polarisation, the Left party alleged that the initiative aims to strike fear among minorities and marginalised sections.

In a sharply worded statement, the CPI Central Office stated that the exercise is a direct continuation of the politics behind the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), and the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

## Defence ministry invites private sector to build AMCA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The defence ministry, for the first time, has opted for the private sector for a major defence development project, inviting it to partner in building a next-generation fighter jet under the ambitious Advanced Multirole Combat aircraft (AMCA). The cost of the proposed deal is more than 15,000 crores.

Once it is inducted, India will join an exclusive list of countries with fifth-generation fighters. As of May 2025, only the US (F-22 and F-35), China (J-20) and Russia (Su-57) have these.

Meanwhile, kick-starting the selection process, the ministry on Wednesday issued a request for proposal (RFP) or tender to the three contenders, including Tata Advanced Systems, Larsen and Toubro and Bharat Forge. The AMCA is rated to be the nation's biggest indigenous aerospace programme. The



Government is fully funding the 15,000 crore project to build the AMCA prototype.

The Government plans to build five prototypes of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) at a new greenfield facility in Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh.

This move is historic as it opens fighter jet manufacturing to the private sector in India and promises faster development. It also strengthens India's push for self-reliance in cutting-edge aerospace technology.

While Larsen and Toubro has partnered with Bharat

Electronics Limited, Bharat Forge has reached an understanding with BEML. Interestingly, state-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has been kept out of the process, sources said.

India has been focusing on the ambitious AMCA project to develop the medium-weight deep penetration fighter jet with advanced stealth features to bolster its air power capability. AMCA, along with the Tejas light combat aircraft, is planned to be the mainstay of the Indian Air Force.

After the three companies

submit their responses to the RFP, the selection process for the project is likely to be completed in four to five months.

The selected private defence major will work with the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), an entity that operates under the defence ministry, for developing the prototypes of the aircraft.

The contract award is expected to be completed by January-March 2027, with the first prototype flight expected between 2028 and 2032. It may enter service after 2035 with series production at the new facility.

The AMCA is likely to be a single-seat twin-engine jet with advanced stealth coatings and internal weapons bays like those on US and Russian planes - the F-22, F-35, and Su-57. It is expected to have an operational ceiling of 55,000 feet and carry 1,500 kg in weapons in internal bays, with 5,500 kg more externally. The AMCA will likely carry a further 6,500 kg in fuel.

## Govt expenditure on health triples to 3.85 lakh crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Government expenditure on healthcare has nearly tripled over the last decade to 3.85 lakh crore in 2022-23, while out-of-pocket spending by households on treatment has declined significantly, according to the National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates released by the Union Health Ministry on Wednesday.

The report showed that Government health expenditure increased from 1.30 lakh crore in 2013-14 to 3.85 lakh crore in 2022-23, stating higher public investment in the health sector.

The share of Government health spending in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose from 1.15 per cent in 2013-14 to 1.43 per cent in 2022-23. According to the new GDP series with base year 2022-23, the figure stands at 1.48 per cent.

The ministry said the increase in public spending



has contributed to a substantial decline in out-of-pocket expenditure incurred by households on healthcare.

According to the report, out-of-pocket expenditure as a share of total health expenditure fell from 64.2 per cent in 2013-14 to 43.4 per cent in 2022-23, indicating reduced financial burden on people seeking treatment.

The report also highlighted that the share of Government health expenditure in total health expenditure increased from 28.6 per cent in 2013-14 to 43.7 per

cent in 2022-23. "In per capita terms, Government Health Expenditure increased nearly 2.7 times from 1,042 in 2013-14 to 2,786 in 2022-23," the ministry said in a statement.

The NHA estimates noted that Government spending on healthcare saw a major rise during the COVID-19 pandemic period, with health expenditure reaching 1.84 per cent of GDP in 2021-22 due to emergency response measures, implementation of Emergency COVID Response Packages (ECRP-I and II) and the nationwide vaccination pro-

gramme. During the pandemic period, out-of-pocket expenditure as a share of total health expenditure declined further to 39.4 per cent, the report said.

The share of Government health expenditure in total health expenditure has increased by almost 15 percentage points, from 28.6 per cent in 2013-14 to 43.7 per cent in 2022-23. This shift underscores the important role of public financing in the health system and signals that policy efforts are moving in the right direction — towards a more affordable, equitable and accessible healthcare system for all, the statement said.

Reducing the burden of out-of-pocket expenditure on households has been a key priority for the Government, pursued through various health schemes and a sustained commitment to Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the statement said.



## States Focus

# AIADMK factions patch up after fortnight of rift in TN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Chennai

After remaining divided for about a fortnight, the AIADMK factions patched up on Wednesday, with the rebel camp claiming there was never a split in the party but only "difference of opinion" that saw some MLAs led by the Shanmugam-Velumani duo defying party chief Edappadi K Palaniswami and side with the TVK Government during the confidence vote.

The rebel MLAs led by former State minister SP Velumani called on party chief Palaniswami at his Greenways Road residence here and expressed their support for the AIADMK general secretary, a party source said. However, CV Shanmugam was conspicuous by his absence, but Velumani claimed he was with them.

Shortly after calling on Palaniswami, Velumani met



Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker JCD Prabhakar.

Speaking to reporters, Velumani denied having engineered a split in the AIADMK. Also, he refuted a charge by Palaniswami supporters that his group voted in favour of the TVK Government during its May 13 floor test, aspiring for high positions in the Government.

Earlier, about 13 legislators, including senior leader KC Veeramani, accompanied Velumani. Shanmugam, who was conspicuous by his

absence, had, along with Velumani and other legislators, demanded that the party support the TVK Government.

However, Velumani said Shanmugam was also with them. "We came from Shanmugam's office (before meeting Palaniswami). So, we are all united," he said.

Shortly after meeting the AIADMK chief, Velumani, accompanied by former minister Dr C Vijayabaskar, legislators supporting him, and senior leaders, including Agri SS Krishnamurthy from

# Amit Shah orders 360-degree security for border areas

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH  
New Delhi

In a coordinated effort to enhance border security and promote grassroots development, Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah issued explicit directives during a high-level security review meeting held in Bikaner, Rajasthan, on Wednesday. The meeting underlined the importance of reinforcing border districts between India and Pakistan through a comprehensive 360-degree security framework that involves citizens, State Governments, and security agencies.

Central to these directives is the mandate to fully implement all Government welfare

to access benefits such as housing under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, health insurance under Ayushman Bharat, financial inclusion via the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, and agricultural support schemes. The objective is to bridge developmental gaps, improve living standards, and foster security among residents facing unique challenges due to their proximity to international boundaries.

This initiative forms part of a broader strategy to align development with security concerns. Saturation aims to reduce vulnerabilities that could be exploited for infiltration, smuggling, or radicalisation. Enhanced governance through VVP-II will focus on last-mile service delivery,



schemes in border villages, along with the effective utilisation of the national cyber-crime helpline '1930' to address increasing digital threats.

Addressing senior officials from border districts, Shah emphasised the need for result-oriented actions to ensure that no eligible beneficiary in frontier areas is excluded from flagship central and State schemes. These include programmes under the Border Area Development Programme (BADP), the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP-II), and various social welfare initiatives focused on infrastructure, health, education, and livelihoods. Complete saturation involves engaging every household in border villages

infrastructure development, and economic support to local populations. Shah also called for a detailed study of crime sources, networks, and patterns, particularly regarding drug trafficking, narcotics smuggling, and economic offences, to develop long-term preventive strategies. District authorities have been tasked with ensuring legal and financial compliance among banking institutions, verifying large businesses, and scrutinising funding sources to dismantle mule accounts, counterfeit companies, and forged documents often linked to cross-border crimes.

Equally important is Shah's emphasis on combating cyber-crimes, which have become a contemporary threat.



## ODISHA: RS BYPOLL ON JUNE 18 AFTER SAMANTARAY'S EXIT

The Election Commission on Wednesday announced that the bypoll to a Rajya Sabha seat from Odisha that has been vacated by Debashish Samantaray will be held on June 18. Samantaray, who was elected to the Rajya Sabha on a BJD ticket in 2024 and was to continue till 2030, resigned both from the membership of the Upper House of Parliament as well as from the party on Monday. He joined the BJP the next day.

The poll panel, in a statement, said a formal notification for the by-election will be issued on June 1, and the last date of filing of nominations is June 8.

Scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on June 9, and candidates can withdraw their nomination on June 11.

"The voting for the lone Rajya Sabha seat will be held between 9 am and 4 pm on June 18 if there is more than one candidate in the fray. The counting of votes will be conducted the same day at 5 pm," an official said. (PTI)



## UGANDAN WOMAN SUSPECTED OF EBOLA TESTS NEGATIVE

A 28-year-old woman from Uganda, suspected of showing symptoms of the Ebola virus, has tested negative, Karnataka Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said on Wednesday. According to officials, the woman, who had arrived from an Ebola-affected region, was moved from a hotel to the state-run Epidemic Diseases Hospital here on Tuesday after she developed mild symptoms such as body aches. Her blood samples were collected and sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune for testing. The woman was placed in isolation at the hospital for observation and is otherwise in good health, sources said. (PTI)

# 30 lakh women beneficiaries ineligible: Suvendu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday said that around 30 lakh beneficiaries of 'Lakshmi Bhandar', a financial assistance scheme for women introduced by the previous TMC Government, were ineligible as they were either non-Indians or their names were permanently deleted from the voter list.

Adhikari introduced a form for the 'Annapurna Bhandar' scheme, as announced by the BJP Government to provide ₹3,000 per month for eligible women in the State.

Addressing a press conference at the State administrative headquarters, Nabanna,



Adhikari said "approximately 30 lakh beneficiaries" were receiving Lakshmi Bhandar assistance despite being ineligible as their names had been permanently deleted from the voter list, or they had not applied to a SIR-linked tribunal or for citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) for

inclusion. He said that the CAA applicants and those who have appealed to an SIR-linked tribunal after adjudication for entry on the voter list would, however, be eligible for the 'Annapurna Bhandar' scheme. Adhikari said that the BJP had promised in its manifesto to introduce the 'Annapurna

Bhandar', replacing the erstwhile Mamata Banerjee Government's 'Lakshmi Bhandar'.

Under the 'Lakshmi Bhandar' scheme, women in the general category used to get ₹1,500 per month, and ₹1,700 for the SC/ST category.

"Our first notion was that the 'Lakshmi Bhandar' list was verified," Adhikari said.

The chief minister said that his Government introduced a form on Wednesday for filling out by the applicants, while stating that verification of these will be done under the guidance of Women's Welfare Minister Agnimitra Paul and the leadership of the State's chief secretary and the finance secretary.

## UPSC RELEASES PRELIMS ANSWER KEY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Wednesday released the provisional answer key for the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, 2026.

It is for the first time that the provisional answer key has been released by the Commission after the completion of the preliminary exam.

Candidates can submit their representations, if any, until 6 pm on May 31 through the dedicated online portal, "Online Question Paper Representation Portal (QPRP)", available at upsonline.nic.in, the UPSC said in a statement.



Representations are required to be submitted by indicating the correct answer key according to the candidate's understanding, along with a brief explanation and supporting documents from three authentic sources, it said.

"The release of the provisional answer key reflects UPSC's commitment to greater transparency, fairness and integrity in the examination process while providing candidates an opportunity for informed and constructive participation," the statement said.

The civil services examination is conducted annually by the Commission in three stages — preliminary, main and interview — to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), among others.

## TMC MLA Dilip Mondal arrested in Puri over provocative remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

A TMC MLA from West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district was arrested in Odisha's Puri for his alleged provocative remarks during a victory procession, police said on Wednesday.

Bishnupur MLA Dilip Mondal was reportedly staying at a hotel in Puri when a police team traced and arrested him.

He was being taken to Kolkata on a transit remand, a senior officer said. The arrest comes days after a video of Mondal went viral on social media, in which he was heard purportedly issuing threats to workers and supporters of West Bengal BJP and making provocative remarks.

According to the allegations, Mondal had said, "For 15 years, I showed a lot of restraint and kept things peaceful. But that will not continue anymore."

He had also allegedly



made a statement invoking Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari, saying, "Ask your chief minister who Dilip Mondal is".

The police had initiated a search operation after a complaint was lodged over the remarks allegedly made during a TMC victory rally on May 11. A case was registered against him over charges related to provocation and threatening workers of the opponent party, sources said.

As part of the investigation, the police had earlier conducted searches at two properties linked to Mondal in Pailan, on the southern fringes of Kolkata.

## Kakoli Ghosh resigns from all TMC posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

The faultlines within the TMC after its Assembly election drubbing burst further into the open on Wednesday as senior MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar quit all organisational posts and launched a political broadside, invoking corruption allegations, the RG Kar row and the growing grip of I-PAC over the party machinery.

The resignation of the four-term Barasat MP — once among the party's most recognisable faces and national president of its women's wing — came barely a day after she attended Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari's administrative review meeting in Kalyani, defying what party sources said was an instruction from the TMC leadership to stay away.

The rapid-fire sequence of events over the last 72 hours has amplified whispers of drift and factional unease within the ruling party, where electoral setbacks are increasingly finding expression through public displays



of discontent. In a letter addressed to TMC State president Subrata Bakshi, Dastidar sought to be relieved of all organisational responsibilities, including her role as chairperson of the All India Trinamool Mahila Congress.

However, Dastidar has not resigned as the Lok Sabha MP from Barasat and continues in Parliament, indicating that her move, at least for now, stops short of a complete political rupture with the party.

But the letter carried the weight of something larger, less a resignation note and more a pointed indictment of the party's internal climate. "My conscience is deeply

disturbed," she wrote, referring to allegations surrounding the ration scam, recruitment irregularities and "financial and administrative improprieties" which, according to her, had generated "anger and distrust" among ordinary people.

An alumna of RG Kar Medical College, Dastidar also referred to the rape and murder of a doctor at the institution and allegations of an attempted cover-up, saying the episode had "personally shaken" her.

In perhaps her most politically loaded remark, she took a swipe at a fellow TMC MP without naming him, in an apparent reference to Kalyan Banerjee.

"There is little meaning in remaining in a position where one cannot stop the indecent conduct of an uncultured and rude party MP towards a woman MP, and where support and empathy are absent from the higher leadership," Dastidar, a close confidante of Mamata Banerjee since the eighties, wrote.

The remark assumes significance as Dastidar was recently removed as chief whip of the TMC's parliamentary party, with the responsibility returning to Kalyan Banerjee — a move that had visibly upset her. Soon after her removal, she had posted on social media: "Known since 1976, journey started in 1984. Four decades of loyalty rewarded today."

Party insiders said the cryptic message was interpreted as a rare public expression of hurt by a leader otherwise seen as among Mamata Banerjee's steadfast loyalists.

Dastidar also turned her guns towards I-PAC, the election consultancy closely associated with the TMC's campaign machinery.

## Monsoon further advances in Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal: IMD



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The monsoon has missed its expected onset date of May 26 in Kerala but has further advanced into some more parts of the southwest and southeast Arabian Sea, Lakshadweep area and Bay of Bengal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday.

The IMD had earlier estimated that the monsoon would arrive in Kerala on May 26 with a model error of ± 4 days.

The monsoon usually sets over Kerala around June 1, marking the beginning of the monsoon season (June to September) in the country.

Last year, the onset of monsoon happened on May 24, according to the department.

## J&K celebrates Eid-ul-Azha with prayers for global peace

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Jammu

Amid tight security arrangements, Eid-ul-Azha was celebrated across Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, with large congregations of Muslims offering prayers at mosques and Eidgahs.

Eid-ul-Azha, which commemorates the devotion and sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim, was observed with religious spirit across the Union Territory.

The largest congregation was witnessed at the Eidgah on Residency Road in Jammu, followed by significant gatherings at Mecca Masjid Bathindi and Jamia Masjid Talab Khatikav. Devotees in large numbers participated in special prayers held early in the morning.

Following the Eid prayers, worshippers performed the traditional ritual sacrifice of animals, including sheep, goats, and cattle, symbolising faith, devotion, and submission to the will of God.

Religious leaders extended Eid greet-



ings to the people and prayed for peace, well-being, and prosperity across Jammu and Kashmir and the world.

Security forces maintained strict vigilance across sensitive locations to ensure peaceful celebrations.

Sunni Islamic scholar and Shahi Imam of Jamia Masjid Khadike Talab, Mufti Inayatullah Qasmi, extended Eid greetings to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, praying for peace, prosperity, and well-being across the region and the world.

## 93% of Bihar households now have tap water: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Patna

More than 93 per cent of families in Bihar have been provided with tap water connections, with the number of beneficiary households rising from 2.66 lakh in 2016 to 1.87 crore in 2026, the State Government said on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference, Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) Minister Sanjay Kumar Singh said tap water connections in left-out hamlets, especially Mahadalit colonies, would be ensured within the next three months.

He said the Government has set a target of covering 2.02 crore families with water connections. Singh said the Government has also taken several measures to deal



with the prevailing heat-wave conditions.

"A total of 475 water tanks and several water ATMs have been deployed to ensure water availability in vulnerable areas. Control rooms are also active in this regard. A total of 1.13 lakh hand pumps were repaired in rural areas during 2025-26," he said.

PHED Principal Secretary Rajesh Kumar admitted that

86,000 hand pumps are still defunct, but said the department was working on a "war footing" to repair those.

Singh said the Government has decided to set up 100 water ATMs in the ongoing fiscal year, which will also be operational during events such as Shravani Mela.

He said the department has also set up an NABL-accredited state-level labora-

tory, 38 district-level laboratories and 75 sub-divisional laboratories for regular water quality testing.

Multi-parameter Field Testing Kits (FTKS) and H2S vials have also been made available at every panchayat level, he added.

"The data so generated is registered on the Centre's Water Quality Management Information System (WQMIS) portal, enabling continuous monitoring and reporting," Singh said.

"The department is also relying on IoT-based real-time monitoring of water availability through the Payjal App," he said.

The minister said the Centralised Grievance Redressal Cell (CGRC) is fully operational to address complaints related to drinking water supply.



## Assam Assembly passes UCC Bill

TONY DAS in Guwahati

The Assam Assembly on Wednesday passed the UCC Bill that seeks to put in place a common legal framework to govern marriage, divorce, succession and live-in relationships irrespective of religion, even as the opposition demanded that it be sent to a select committee. With the passage of the proposed legislation, Assam became the third State, after Uttarakhand and Gujarat, to pass a Uniform Civil Code Bill. Goa also has one common civil law, which continued from its erstwhile Portuguese colonial period. After a day-long discussion on the 'The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026 Bill', Speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass asked Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to move it for passage. Dass rejected the Opposition's demand that the Bill be sent to a select committee for wider consultation, prompting them to move to the Well of the House and keep on shouting till the Bill was passed. As the opposition did not move the amendments it had raised, the Speaker put

the Bill for voice voting, amid continuous slogans of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and 'Jai Shree Ram' by the ruling bench. "I declare that the Bill is passed," he said after the ruling members voted in favour of it. As soon as the Bill was passed, it was welcomed by a thunderous applause. Aiming for a common set of laws on a range of personal matters like marriage, divorce, succession and live-in relationships irrespective of religion, the Assam Government had on Monday tabled a Bill on the Uniform Civil Code, seeking to ban polygamy and make registration of live-in relationships compulsory.

The Bill, however, said that it will not be applicable to any person belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and residing in Assam. It proposed several punitive measures, including seven years imprisonment for bigamy or polygamy, and three months in jail for not registering a live-in relationship. "There can't be a better start to our five-year tenure than passing the UCC in the first assembly session of our



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma arrives to attend the session of the 16th State Legislative Assembly in Guwahati on Wednesday PTI

new Government. Prices of gas can decrease and increase, but no Government can return the dignity of women if it's lost once. If the BJP had not won this time, lakhs of women wouldn't be able to get the shield of security," Sarma said. Earlier during the discussion on the Bill, he claimed that the Congress was the first to advocate a Uniform Civil Code way back in 1925, and the Opposition party is no longer secular and has become a representative of one particular community. Sarma said the proposed legislation is based on the

foundation of the Constitution's Article 44, not on any BJP or RSS ideology as alleged by the opposition bench.

He justified the exclusion of tribals from the ambit of the proposed legislation, claiming that they already have many customary laws for ages on such personal matters. "Tribals don't support polygamy, give equal rights to girls and don't recognise live-in relationships. They, in a way, have been implementing the UCC for ages. Self-regulation is the best regulation. So, we don't want to impose it on the

tribals," Sarma said. "The UCC has a long history. It was first demanded by Congress in 1925. It was also suggested in 1937 by Jawaharlal Nehru. That same Congress is opposing it from the angle of the Quran and Shariat angle, not from the Hindu or Christian or tribal angle," Sarma said. "The Congress is opposing the UCC. Their assembly composition proves that they are not representing all castes, creeds, and religions, but they represent only one specific community. The Congress doesn't represent Assam's geography," he added.

The opposition members, on the other hand, termed the Bill on Uniform Civil Code as "BJP's political agenda" and sought wider consultation among all stakeholders before the passage of the proposed legislation. They also said it would hurt the rights of a certain section of society and alleged that bringing in the UCC is a diversionary tactic from the main issues like unemployment, flood and the condition of Government schools, among others.

## Rahul alleges OSM contract scam; CBSE denies charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in New Delhi

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday rejected an allegation that it had awarded a contract to Coempt Edutech, saying the claim was "erroneous, misleading and not based on facts."

The board said the contract was indeed awarded to Coempt Edutech, but dismissed the allegations against the firm. The response came after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged irregularities in the CBSE's On-Screen Marking (OSM) system and demanded an independent judicial probe and an investigation by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the matter.

"CBSE rejects the allegations regarding the award of contract to Coempt Edutech. It is erroneous, misleading and not based on facts," the board said in a reply to Rahul on X.

It said the contract was awarded after following due procedure under the General Financial Rules. "CBSE has followed the



General Financial Rules protocols scrupulously in the awarding of the contract to the agency. CBSE floated the RFP for Digital Evaluation of Answer books for Board Exams 2026 on the Central Public Procurement portal on August 28, 2025 and awarded the contract to the qualified bidder," the board said.

Earlier in the day, Rahul demanded an independent judicial probe as well as an SIT to unearth the truth behind the "entire scam", and asked why a firm that had a murky past in Telangana handed the contract to the Board. Gandhi said CBSE students and their parents are traumatised, but Prime Minister

Narendra Modi "has nothing to say." In a video put out on his social media accounts, Gandhi said unbelievable details are emerging about the Class 12 CBSE exam.

"COEMPT, the company that did the On-Screen Marking (OSM) for your exam, was actually called Globarena. Globarena has carried out this scam twice before in Telangana, once in the board exam in Telangana in 2019 and after that again in Telangana in 2023. The same OSM-based errors were responsible for the death by suicide of 23 young Indians in Telangana," the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

## Goa club fire case: ED attaches `11 cr property

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in New Delhi/Panaji

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached immovable property valued at `11.01 crore in connection with an ongoing investigation into the illegal operation of the "Birch by Romeo Lane" night-club at Arpora, Goa.

A fire at the nightclub in Arpora, Goa, on December 6 last year resulted in the deaths of 25 people, including five tourists. The brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, who ran the club, had fled India; however, they were traced and detained in Thailand, then deported back to India.

The ED has attached properties under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

The federal probing agency began an investigation based on FIRs registered by the Goa Police at Juna Police Station and Mapusa Police Station against Saurabh Luthra and



others under various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

The FIRs relate not only to the major fire incident, which caused the death of 25 persons and injuries to many others, but also to offences involving forgery of documents, including fake and fabricated No Objection Certificates (NOCs) and other statutory documents used for obtaining regulatory approvals.

Investigation under PMLA revealed that eGS Hospitality Goa Arpora LLP was operating

the establishment without the necessary statutory approvals, including a Fire NOC.

The partners of the establishment had allegedly submitted forged documents, including a fake Health NOC and a fake Police Clearance Certificate, to acquire licences and present the illegal establishment as legitimate.

Further investigations revealed that the partners, in collusion, knowingly continued commercial operations despite the expiry of the mandated approvals, which

had expired on 31 March, 2024, and were not renewed; nonetheless, the establishment continued to operate.

The investigation also uncovered that the establishment generated a total revenue of approximately Rs 29.78 crore during the period from FY 2023-24 to FY 2025-26, up to 6 December 2025, which is identified as Proceeds of Crime under the provisions of PMLA. Searches conducted on January 23, 2026, at various premises belonging to the entity resulted in the seizure of digital devices and the freezing of bank accounts amounting to approximately `59 lakh.

Earlier, a Provisional Attachment Order amounting to approximately `17.45 crore had been issued in connection with the case.

With the latest attachment and freezing, the total amount attached or frozen now stands at approximately `29.05 crore, the agency stated.

## India's first Rock Check Dam inaugurated in Ladakh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in Jammu

An innovative Rock Check Dam, the first of its kind in India, aimed at achieving long-term water and agricultural sustainability in Ladakh, was inaugurated by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena at Upshi in Leh on Wednesday.

The Rock Check Dam, built over the River Indus, 44 km from Leh, at an altitude of 11,400 feet, has been conceptualised as an eco-friendly, cost-effective and sustainable remedy to Ladakh's water crisis.

This rock check dam has been built using large rocks, sourced from the riverbed and the surroundings, to hold the water in the river.

LG Vinai Kumar Saxena has named the project "Sindhu Jal Samridhhi Abhiyan (SJSJA)" that aims at augmenting the water level by creating rock check dams at specific locations of the river, particularly the narrow passages where tapping the river water is relatively easier and more effective.

The location of the check dam is identified in consultation with the villagers/locals. The Lieutenant Governor has directed the Irrigation & Flood Control Department to construct three more such check dams



within a month on experiment basis. In many parts of Ladakh, the Indus River becomes too shallow. As a result, standard motors and pumps fail to lift water from the river to the uphill fields. This is where these rock check dams would play a crucial role.

These check dams would create a big pondage area storing ample water for use during the peak sowing season.

Because the rocks have been sourced directly from the riverbed, there is no use of cement or concrete in the construction of this check dam. This makes it a completely eco-friendly project.

The LG said that the Sindhu Jal

Samridhhi Abhiyan would help improve irrigation facilities, strengthen water security and support sustainable agriculture in remote villages.

"It is another innovative and eco-friendly project, aimed at achieving long-term water security in Ladakh after the successful launch of Project Him Sarovar. The Rock Check Dam has been conceived as a model of sustainable water and agricultural security, while preserving the fragile ecological character of Ladakh's ecosystem. The initiative has received encouraging response from villagers," LG Saxena said.

## Use tech to boost citizen trust: Jitendra Singh to IAS trainees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in New Delhi

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday told a group of civil servants that technology must be used not merely for efficiency but also for improving trust between citizens and institutions.

Interacting with trainee officers of the 2024 batch of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), he said modern governance no longer functions through rigid hierar-

chies and one-way communication. Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel, encouraged the officers to remain open-minded learners throughout their careers, saying the ability to adapt, unlearn and evolve is now more valuable than static knowledge.

He said the nature of administration has changed significantly in the last decade with greater emphasis on transparency, responsiveness and citizen participation.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's philosophy of "maximum governance, minimum

leadership responsibilities and changing public expectations from civil servants. He encouraged them to maintain neutrality, remain accessible to citizens and focus on meaningful public outcomes rather than visibility. Describing India@2047 as a national mission rather than merely a milestone, Singh said the officers of this generation would become the principal drivers of India's rise in the coming decades. He urged them to approach public service with humility, discipline and a larger sense of national purpose.

Government," the minister said technology must be used not merely for efficiency but also for improving trust between citizens and institutions.

During the interaction, the minister also exchanged views with the trainee officers on district administration, governance challenges,

and

leadership responsibilities and changing public expectations from civil servants. He encouraged them to maintain neutrality, remain accessible to citizens and focus on meaningful public outcomes rather than visibility. Describing India@2047 as a national mission rather than merely a milestone, Singh said the officers of this generation would become the principal drivers of India's rise in the coming decades. He urged them to approach public service with humility, discipline and a larger sense of national purpose.

## TN CM Vijay meets PM Modi; raises Mokedatu dam row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in New Delhi/Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday and discussed matters concerning the State, including the Mokedatu dam issue, fishermen arrests and the Tamil invocation song row.

In addition, Vijay also met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and handed over a memorandum to prioritise funding for ports, national highways, railway projects and industrial corridors that are crucial for Tamil Nadu's development.

This was Vijay's maiden official visit to the national capital after assuming office. His meeting with the PM and Sitharaman comes days after his party TVK secured an upset win in the April 23 Assembly polls, defeating Dravidian heavyweights DMK and AIADMK and forming its Government with the support of allies, including VCK.

The CM raised the issue of the Tamil Thai Vazhthu (invoca-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay during a meeting in New Delhi PTI

tion) song, as a controversy had broken out over the sequence of playing it third — after Vande Mataram and the National Anthem in the swearing-in ceremony of his Government, as well as the expansion of his cabinet.

In a letter addressed to PM Modi, Vijay said, "At the outset, I wish to affirm that the Government and people of Tamil Nadu hold the National Anthem and the National Song in the highest esteem."

"Tamil Nadu has consistently upheld the dignity and decorum associated with all national symbols and remains deeply committed to the unity, integrity and constitutional values of India. I would also like to bring to your kind notice the long-established position of Tamil Thai Vazhthu in the public life of Tamil Nadu," he said in the letter.

For several decades, it has traditionally been rendered at the commencement of

Government, educational, cultural and public functions across Tamil Nadu, and the practice has also been formally recognised by the Tamil Nadu Government, he said.

"Following the issuance of the above Ministry of Home Affairs order, Lok Bhavan has adopted the sequence of Vande Mataram, National Anthem and thereafter Tamil Thai Vazhthu. The placement of Tamil Thai Vazhthu subsequent to the National Anthem has led to widespread public concern and opposition from various sections of society in Tamil Nadu, as it departs from the long-standing and officially recognised practice followed in the State."

"It is submitted that Tamil Thai Vazhthu occupies a unique position in Tamil Nadu as the State invocation song symbolising the linguistic heritage, cultural identity and collective sentiments of the people of the state. Traditionally, it has always occupied the opening position in official functions as a mark of respect, pride and glory to the Tamil language and culture," the CM added.

## Demographic shift not limited to border areas: MHA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in New Delhi

The demographic changes due to illegal migration are not limited just to border areas, but their impact has extended, "affecting urban centres, industrial corridors, tribal regions, and other socially and economically sensitive areas," said a Government notification.

The notification issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs on the constitution of a High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCCD) under Justice Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar, a retired Supreme Court judge, said "extensive challenges" have arisen from demographic changes due to illegal immigration.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had announced the formation of the committee to assess demographic changes across India



due to "illegal immigration and other unnatural causes".

Headquartered in New Delhi, the committee will also include the Census Commissioner, along with retired IAS officer Durga Shankar Mishra, ex-IPS officer Balaji Srivastava and Dr Shamika Ravi as members and will submit its report in a year.

"The joint secretary (foreigners-I), Ministry of Home Affairs, will serve as the member secretary of this committee," Shah had said on Tuesday.

## Mizoram plans `2,289 crore hydropower project on Tuivai river

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE in Aizawl

The Mizoram Government is planning to set up a 132-mw hydropower project on the Tuivai river in Saitual district near the Manipur border to boost electricity generation amid rising power demand in the State, officials said on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma chaired a high-level review meeting to expedite the proposed Tuivai Hydroelectric Project, which is estimated to cost `2,289.50 crore and is expected to be completed

within five years. Power Minister F Rodingliana and senior officials of the Power and Electricity Department attended the meeting.

The Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been completed, and the proposal is now ready for the tendering process, officials said.

The State Government is exploring the implementation of the project under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, they added.

According to the 20th Electric Power Survey, Mizoram's peak power demand stands at 182 MW



Chief Minister Lalduhoma

and is projected to rise to around 213 MW by 2030.

Although the State has an installed power generation capacity of 50.20 MW, actual

production remains significantly lower, with only around 10 per cent of Mizoram's total electricity requirement currently being

met through local generation, officials said. The State Government spends nearly `649.54 crore annually on power purchases, excluding transmission charges, making expansion of local power generation a priority area, they said.

The Tuivai Hydroelectric Project was initially surveyed by the Central Water Commission in 1992 with a proposed generation capacity of 210 MW.

However, as part of the proposed dam area extended into neighbouring Manipur, the project was redesigned

and re-surveyed. A revised DPR has now been prepared with a reduced generation capacity of 132 MW.

The review meeting also decided that the annual financial requirements for implementation of the project would be examined in consultation with the Finance Department.

Besides the Tuivai project, the meeting reviewed the progress of the ongoing Tuirini Hydroelectric Project and the implementation of works under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).



## Editor's TAKE

### The Quad speaks: Is Beijing listening?

The Quad meet in Delhi was a reminder that the group has a potential to take on China and is a force to reckon with in Indo-Pacific

When the foreign ministers of Quad countries – the United States, India, Japan, and Australia – met in Delhi, they sent a message to the world, – Quad is here to stay and will be proactive in defending the cause it stands for – to keep Indo Pacific free from power play. Some had been declaring the Quad's demise, pointing to the fact that its national leaders haven't met since 2024. Critics often question its relevance in a world where ideology and persuasion is waning fast. Yet the very convening of this ministerial – on Indian soil, in the shadow of a recent Trump-Xi summit – proved that the Quad is a potent force. The timing of the New Delhi meeting follows US President Donald Trump's visit to China and is widely understood as a signal that US engagement with Beijing does not diminish Washington's commitment to the Indo-Pacific Quad framework. India's decision to host the meet underscored urgency over protocol. It is no denying that the Quad has always been diplomatically coy about naming its primary concern. The grouping does not describe itself as an anti-China alliance, instead framing its purpose around constructive regional contributions. However, the China variable remains the unspoken organising principle behind nearly every agenda it takes up. This meeting was no different. While the closure of the Strait of Hormuz was on the agenda, the top priority was China.

The agenda was substantive – confirm cooperation in critical minerals and emerging technologies – two domains where China's dominance poses risks. Supply chain resilience, maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, and the governance of next-generation technologies rounded out the strategic priorities. For Australia, Japan, and India, the task is to continue investing in their national security as the most effective way to ensure Washington that they are powerful in their own right and capable of countering China and do not depend on the United States. This is no small thing. Both India and Japan carry unresolved territorial disputes with Beijing – the Galwan shadow still lingers over the Himalayas, and Chinese vessels continue to test nerves around the Senkaku Islands.

The biggest takeaway of the Delhi meeting was that the US has not abandoned the Indo-Pacific. As part of the summit debrief, the potential sale of US weapons to Taiwan likely featured, and Rubio was expected to receive private support from his Quad colleagues. This is quiet but consequential diplomacy – the kind that is vital for balance of power. The Quad entered 2026 carrying the weight of a full year of Indian chairmanship that concluded without the Leaders' Summit it was meant to produce – a gap whose strategic cost is real, since prolonged silence carries a reputational cost. It was thus a necessary course correction.

The way forward is clear, if demanding. The Quad must move from signalling to delivery – on critical mineral supply chains, on maritime domain awareness, on semiconductor and AI governance. A Leaders' Summit must follow. China will not be deterred by meetings alone; it responds to capability, cohesion, and credibility. Quad has the mettle but it must show it.

# The Rupee's real worth: Time for a new narrative?

India is the world's third-largest economy. Its currency deserves to be judged by what it builds and buys – not by an exchange rate inherited from history



VIVEK AGGARWAL

SHAH FAESAL

India stands today as the world's third-largest economy in purchasing power terms, posting growth rates among the highest globally, with record foreign exchange reserves and equity markets at historic highs. Across a world riven by geopolitical conflict, supply-chain fractures, and shifting alliances, India has demonstrated macroeconomic resilience that most nations can only aspire to.

And yet, a curious paradox persists. Every time the rupee moves – from 85 to 87 to 90 against the dollar – headlines speak of "decline", citizens express alarm, and a narrative of weakness takes hold. This perception is not merely inaccurate. It is damaging to the economic confidence that sustains growth itself.

### A civilisation that understood value long before the \$ existed

India's monetary culture dates back to ancient times. The subcontinent was minting coins as early as the 6th century BCE, with the silver punch-marked karshapana circulating across the Gangetic plains. When Pliny the Elder wrote in the first century CE that Rome was hemorrhaging fifty million sesterces annually to India for spices, textiles, and precious stones, he was not describing charity - he was describing a trade surplus. Gold coins minted in India were widely trusted for their purity and were used extensively in trade and commerce.

A civilisation with this monetary depth cannot reduce the worth of its currency – or the confidence of its people – to the daily movement of a bilateral exchange rate. The true strength of a currency lies not in how many units equal a dollar, but in the productive capacity, institutional resilience, and civilisational confidence that stand behind it.

### The fallacy of exchange rate absolutism

The fundamental error in public discourse is treating the nominal exchange rate as an



LET THE RUPEE BE JUDGED BY WHAT IT BUILDS, WHAT IT BUYS, AND WHAT IT ENABLES FOR A BILLION PEOPLE STRIVING TOWARDS PROSPERITY. THAT IS ITS TRUE VALUE – AND THAT IS THE STORY INDIA MUST HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO TELL

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absolute verdict on currency strength.

The Japanese yen trades at roughly 155 to the dollar; the South Korean won at over 1,500. Are these failing economies? Japan is the world's fourth-largest economy, while South Korea is a technological powerhouse. Exchange rates reflect historical denomination choices and monetary policy - not economic weakness.

What matters is purchasing power within the domestic economy. The World Bank's International Comparison Program places India's GDP at approximately \$18 trillion in PPP terms - third globally, behind only the United States and China. One rupee buys considerably more in India than its dollar-equivalent would in America. The Big Mac Index by The Economist is often cited as a popular indicator suggesting that the Indian rupee is undervalued against the US dollar, based on the lower price of McDonald's burgers in India compared to the United States.

### The strategic advantage of a competitive currency

A rupee that is not artificially strengthened serves a vital function: it maintains export competitiveness. Remittances reached a record \$135.4 billion in FY2024-25. A stronger nominal rupee would reduce the rupee value of these inflows, directly diminishing earnings for millions of families. Export sectors from pharmaceuticals to textiles to software benefit from a competitive exchange rate. This is not an argument for a persistently weaker rupee, but for a currency strategy aligned with India's own economic

conditions and national interests, ensuring exchange-rate policy serves India-first monetary priorities.

### The path forward

Internationalising the rupee through bilateral trade settlement, and advancing the digital rupee through India's CBDC initiative, offer pathways to reduce dependence on dollar-clearing. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's recent call for Indians to choose made-in-India products, moderate gold imports, and favour domestic tourism is not merely a patriotic appeal – it is sound economic policy. Gold imports are a major drain on foreign exchange; every rupee spent on domestic tourism circulates within the national economy rather than financing outflows.

India holds unparalleled potential in heritage tourism. With 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and living traditions spanning millennia, it offers experiences unavailable anywhere else on earth. The recently inscribed 'Maratha Military Landscapes' add to a portfolio of globally unique experiences that can strengthen both economic activity and the currency's underlying domestic demand base.

domestic tourism circulates within the national economy rather than financing outflows.

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### Atmavishwas as economic policy

For an economy growing at record rates with historically low inflation, the currency exchange rate is a data point, not a destiny. Let the rupee be judged by what it builds, what it buys, and what it enables for a billion people striving towards prosperity. That is its true value – and that is the story India must have the confidence to tell.



## PIC TALK



A young woman applies henna on a hand during the Eid al-Adha festival in Murshidabad district, West Bengal. PHOTO: PTI

# The Arsenal way: Fair play, patience and glory



KUSHAN MITRA

## 2ND OPINION

I have to credit the arrival of cable television in India for my enduring love and passion for Arsenal Football Club, or 'The Arsenal', as some might choose to call it. And the joy that has erupted across the world at this storied football club winning their first English Premier League title in 22 years has been unprecedented.

And it is the sheer spread of the support, from the rich boroughs of London to the slums of Kampala, Uganda, from extreme left-wing politicians like Jeremy Corbyn to right-wing economists like Niall Ferguson, from New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani to Barron Trump. Few national football titles have ever brought so much happiness to so many disparate people.

Even in India, the small cohort of Arsenal fans I associate with share extremely different opinions on politics and



economics. Some work in government, some are top corporate leaders, but we were all sending each other 'Congratulations' messages after the club won its title. I feel some of it was a release, after two decades of sometimes being in the doldrums and sometimes pretending before imploding, or what commentators called 'bottling it'. This one felt deserved.

And why deserved? Not just because, under their manager Mikel Arteta, they have become an extremely strong team, a physical side that plays well off the ball and is deadly at set-pieces, but because of something else, I feel. Arsenal did not manipulate the books, despite being owned by one of the richest sports empires in the world under Stan and Josh Kroenke. This is unlike the massaging of the Financial Fair Play rules by teams like Chelsea and especially the Abu Dhabi-owned

Manchester City, although these charges are yet to be resolved. Arsenal played fair, and that will show, as the team will likely close this year with over a billion pounds in revenue, making them one of the most valuable and profitable sports teams in the world.

And that is why fans across the world love Arsenal, because they have played fair. They could have also thrown money at the problem and washed off the sins of an oligarch or oil tycoon. They did not; they played within the rules, they funded their stadium with their own money, and they sold their best players to stay afloat. Many of their current stars, particularly England striker Bukayo Saka, as well as Brazilian striker Gabriel Martinelli, are home-grown talents who rose through the ranks. In fact, the youngest ever EPL winner is 16-year-old schoolboy Max Dowman, a rising star of the Arsenal academy brought into the first team. They revived the faltering careers of some, like team captain and Norway midfielder Martin Ødegaard. They spent judiciously; yes, they did spend a lot on England midfielder Declan Rice, a record sum. But this is an organic team like no other in global football. Many other teams, and indeed even columnists on cultural issues, are just shocked at the level of joy and happiness Arsenal have brought. It certainly made me a very happy person.



The writer is Director and the Printer & Publisher of The Pioneer

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## MARKETS UNDER PRESSURE AMID GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY AND VOLATILITY

The Nifty 50 continues to face volatility and downward pressure amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, a weakening rupee, and elevated crude oil prices. The benchmark index recently slipped below the 24,000 mark due to profit booking and mixed global cues, underlining the importance of informed investing and disciplined money management during uncertain times. Lingering tensions between the US and Iran have heightened concerns over global supply chains and shipping routes. As a result, crude oil prices have remained elevated. Since India is one of the world's largest oil importers, higher crude prices fuel inflationary pressures and widen the current account deficit.

At the same time, the Indian rupee has touched fresh lows against the US dollar, making imports more expensive and weakening overall economic sentiment. Global uncertainty, coupled with strong economic data from the US, has also triggered sustained selling by foreign institutional investors, leading to liquidity outflows from Indian markets. Investor sentiment remains cautious due to fears of prolonged inflation, high borrowing costs, and uncertainty over future interest rate cuts by the Reserve Bank of India and the US Federal Reserve. In such a climate, market participants are advised to closely monitor sector indices, live index movements, and market data through platforms such as NSE India and BSE India.

JAYANTHY CK MANIAM | MUMBAI

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Cockroach Janata Party under legal scanner

The growing popularity of the 'Cockroach Janata Party', created by Abhijeet Deepke, has sparked controversy over the alleged manipulation of figures and the commercialisation of serious public issues. In a petition filed before the Supreme Court, Advocate Raja Choudhary has sought an investigation into what he describes as the seemingly unconstitutional activities of the party. According to the petition, the movement has attempted to exploit serious court proceedings by turning them into a "viral spectacle" on social media platforms. While the initiative reportedly began as a satirical response to issues affecting the youth, critics argue that it has gradually transformed discussions on unemployment, public grievances, and political participation into matters of controversy and sensationalism.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the repeated use of references to the judiciary in online campaigns. Legal experts believe that such actions could invite stricter scrutiny from authorities. The matter may even fall within the Central Government's jurisdiction to examine whether the party's 'X' (formerly Twitter) account poses concerns related to public order or national security.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | FARIDABAD

### Pope Leo XIV's warning on the AI race

Pope Leo XIV's encyclical raises concerns that go beyond theology. It highlights how corporate giants increasingly shape the development, deployment, and regulation of artificial intelligence. When technological progress moves faster than the wisdom needed to govern it, the benefits are often concentrated among the powerful, while the risks are borne by the wider public. What is needed is not resistance to technology, but stronger accountability. Independent oversight bodies, mandatory transparency from AI developers, and legal frameworks that hold companies responsible for foreseeable harms are essential. Several democracies have already begun taking meaningful steps in this direction.

India, too, stands at a crucial moment where present policy choices will have long-term consequences. A regulatory approach focused only on rapid AI adoption, without addressing concerns such as data governance, algorithmic bias, and labour displacement, may prove short-sighted.

The Pope's warning is not anti-technology. Rather, it is a reminder that prudence and progress are not opposites – and treating them as such would be a serious mistake.

SM JEEVA | CHENNAI

### Legacy of the Saxophone Colossus

The passing of legendary jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins at the age of 95 marks the end of an extraordinary era in world music. Widely regarded as one of the greatest innovators in jazz history, Rollins transformed the genre through unmatched improvisation, fearless experimentation, and deeply reflective artistry. Iconic albums such as Saxophone Colossus, Tenor Madness, and Freedom Suite inspired generations of musicians across the globe.

His journey reflected humility and the belief that artistic excellence must be accompanied by personal growth and self-discovery. In 1968, he took a break from his successful music career and travelled to Mumbai in search of spiritual understanding and inner peace, which he found in Powai. Among his many honours were the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, the National Medal of Arts, and the Kennedy Center Honors for his contribution to American culture. Despite retiring in 2014 due to pulmonary fibrosis, Rollins remained an immortal symbol of creative restlessness and intellectual curiosity.

In an era dominated by fleeting trends, the legacy of Sonny Rollins stands as a reminder that true greatness comes from discipline, courage, and reinvention.

VIDYASAGAR REDDY KETHIRI | KANPUR



# Dubare tragedy: The dangerous illusion of 'tamed' elephants

The tragedy raises urgent questions about the continued use of captive elephants for tourism, festivals, and processions in the name of tradition, even as shrinking habitats, broken elephant corridors, and rising human interference intensify conflict between humans and wildlife



**BK SINGH**

This week's tragedy at Dubare elephant camp in Kodagu district, deep inside Karnataka's Western Ghats, questions the decision of the authorities to permit tourists to bathe captive elephants in the flowing waters of the Cauvery river. This camp is located deep within forests dominated by the movement of wild elephants. All captive elephants in this camp were not born in captivity; many were captured from the wild and later tamed in such camps. It is not fair to conclude that tamed elephants have shed all their wild characteristics and fully obey the command and control of their masters - mahouts and kavadis. There have been instances in the past where elephants have killed their masters - mahouts and kavadis. There have also been instances where elephants did not obey the commands of the mahout and ran amok, inflicting casualties and death among crowds.

Captive elephants are often subjected to torture by mahouts using iron ankushes, which can cause bleeding and septicaemia. The footpads of elephants are frequently injured from walking on paved roads. Though camps have treatment facilities under the supervision of veterinary doctors, bleeding from earlobes and footpads is often neglected, and the elephants continue to suffer.

Let me examine in this piece how far we are justified in taking elephants for processions during special occasions and marriages where large crowds gather, and how far we are justified in continuing age-old traditions where tourists are permitted to pour water and rub the elephants' bodies while standing beside them. On several occasions, I have personally failed to convince the Karnataka government not to use captive elephants during Mysuru Dussehra. The argument advanced was: why discontinue traditions?

Captive elephants were extensively used in dragging timber logs across hilly terrain in forestry operations in the past. The Forest Department maintained elephant camps for such operations. However, maintaining these camps was always costly, which restricted their expansion. As forestry operations have now been scaled down and tree felling in hilly terrains prohibited in the interest of conservation, these camps have largely lost their relevance.

Now, bureaucrats and politicians see these camps as permanent centres for training wild elephants that stray out of forests, damage crops and property, and threaten human lives. Earlier, the Karnataka Forest Department carried out khedda operations to capture only a few elephants needed for logging operations. However, with the advent of safer tranquillising techniques, more and more wild elephants are being captured. The department often comes under public pressure to capture elephants straying into villages. The argument advanced is that the elephant population in the wild is increasing due to conservation, and the excess population must therefore be brought into captivity. Wild elephants involved in conflicts, when translocated several hundred kilometres away into another elephant habitat, have often returned to their original homes within weeks, strengthening the argument for bringing such elephants into captivity.

In an era when elephant habitats are continuously fragmenting and shrinking owing to the expansion and widening of linear infrastructure, diversion of forests for mining, industries and development projects, and unauthorised encroachment on forest land, wild animals — especially elephants — are left with little option but to migrate in search of food, shelter, and water, thereby straying into human settlements.

The spread of invasive species and forest fires has also degraded elephant habitats. Palatable plant species and bamboo forests have suffered extensive damage, forcing elephants to move out of forests regularly. Elephant corridors that once provided migratory routes have been occupied by humans. Human settlements and cultivation inside forest pockets have expanded, to the detriment of conservation.

Captive elephant camps like Dubare are them-



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**DUBARE CAMP ALSO HAS TOURIST LODGES RUN BY THE STATE-OWNED JUNGLE LODGES AND RESORTS (JLR). ONE OF THE ACTIVITIES OFFERED TO TOURISTS IS BATHING THE CAMP ELEPHANTS, WHILE ANOTHER IS JEEP SAFARIS THROUGH NEARBY FORESTS TO VIEW WILD ANIMALS. IT HAS ALSO BEEN FOUND THAT THE ENTIRE CAMP AND JLR PREMISES LIE WITHIN A CORRIDOR HISTORICALLY USED BY WILD ELEPHANTS**

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selves islands of human activity within forests. As part of their daily routine, camp elephants are released into forests during the daytime, where they interact with wild elephants. Fights between captive and wild elephants are reported regularly. There have even been instances where captive elephants were killed by wild tuskers. Aggression is a natural part of elephant behaviour and cannot always be controlled by a mahout's ankush. Sometimes, the animals can surprise us.

About a decade ago in Karnataka's Kalaburagi district, an elephant in a procession kicked its mahout in full public view. The kick was mild and the mahout survived the scare. Feeling insulted, the mahout attempted to attack the elephant with an ankush. The elephant became even angrier and kicked him with such force that he fell nearly 20 feet away and died. Elephants killing their mahouts is not uncommon, and such incidents have been reported from across the country.

Within a herd, stronger elephants are also known to target weaker members. This is what happened at Dubare earlier this week. A tusker attacked a makhna (another male elephant without tusks) while tourists were permitted to bathe the herd. The hostility had likely built up over time, and on that fateful day, the tusker chose to attack the makhna in full view of tourists. The makhna collapsed onto a female tourist bathing it, crushing her to death. The tusker continued attacking the makhna until the mahout managed to calm it down. Despite the best treatment provided at the camp, the makhna died the following day.

Dubare camp also has tourist lodges run by the state-owned Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR). One of the activities offered to tourists is bathing the camp elephants, while another is jeep safaris through nearby forests to view wild animals. It has also been found that the entire camp and JLR premises lie within a corridor historically used by wild elephants. Blocking this corridor has disrupted elephant movement and intensified human-elephant conflict.

There are other forest pockets in Kodagu that have been granted for coffee estates. These estates too obstruct elephant corridors. More than 10,000 acres of coffee estate owned by Tata lie within this corridor. The entire estate is fenced, diverting elephants into human settlements and aggravating conflict. Sometimes elephants break through the fencing and enter the estates, threatening workers' lives. Even the narrow roads inside coffee estates are covered by drooping coffee branches on both sides, limiting visibility. Estate management must ensure better visibility and safer movement.

This is a vicious cycle. As wild elephant movement is obstructed, incidents of conflict increase, and every human death places additional pressure on the Forest Department to capture the elephants involved and bring them into captivity. The continued operation of such elephant camps and JLR facilities is not in the interest of conservation.

Such elephant camps should be downsized in a phased manner, and corridors must be restored by removing fencing in Tata Coffee estates and around JLR properties. Tourists should not be allowed near camp elephants, and under no circumstances should close interactions be permitted. Tourist viewing areas should instead be cordoned off, allowing visitors only to observe elephants bathing in the river from a safe distance.

# Yogi Adityanath: Calling a spade a spade in politics



**YOGESH KUMAR DUBEY**

Many a time, I cast my eyes on the Indian political realm as a scholar of English literature. Just as a seasoned English professor can instantly recognise Francis Bacon's measured prose, Shakespeare's poetic style, or George Bernard Shaw's sharp satirical bite from a single sentence, I have grown used to identifying the familiar rhythm of our political leaders' speeches over decades.

That rhythm is predictable: defensive, roundabout, and deliberately evasive. Whether it is Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the BSP, or any other party, the script remains largely the same — "The people will decide", "This is a conspiracy", "Everything will be fine", or "An inquiry will be conducted". The language is soft, safe, and wrapped in layers of political correctness, designed to dilute the question rather than answer it.

Then came Yogi Adityanath in 2017, and the entire tradition of political language was shattered. Yogi introduced a direct, unvarnished, and often blunt style that is rarely heard from the chief ministerial pulpit. He says what he thinks, with minimal embellishment and almost no diplomatic coating. This approach has won him fierce admirers and equally fierce critics.

The most memorable example remains his interview on Aap Ki Adalat with Rajat Sharma. When asked about the death of gangster Mukhtar Ansari, any conventional politician would have taken refuge in standard lines: "The matter is under investigation", "We respect the court", or "We have done nothing wrong". Instead, Yogi replied with characteristic bluntness: "He had to die anyway." He added that a man responsible for many murders cannot escape his fate forever. The sentence instantly became part of political folklore — hailed by some as refreshing candour and condemned by others as insensitive.

This is not an isolated incident. Yogi's entire linguistic pattern stands apart. On the bulldozer action against mafia properties, he repeatedly declared: "The bulldozer will run on mafia properties, not on the huts of the poor." He famously said, "Criminals will either go to jail or meet the Lord." While issuing a 24-hour ultimatum to land mafias, he warned that anyone who grabs the land of the poor would face the bulldozer with no mercy. In the same breath, he added, "We do not perform the aarti of criminals."

Even before becoming Chief Minister, his speeches carried the same sharpness. He once remarked about the Ram Temple, "When no one could stop the disputed structure from being brought down, who will stop the temple from being built?" On cow slaughter and pollution in the Ganga, he asked pointedly whether



animal blood flowing into the river did not count as pollution. On encounters, his standard response has been: "If a criminal fires at the police, the police will certainly retaliate."

These examples illustrate the linguistic revolution Yogi has brought to Indian politics. Traditional leaders weave intricate webs of words; Yogi strikes with them. The results are visible: crime rates in Uttar Pradesh have declined significantly, according to government data; major gangsters like Atiq Ahmed and Mukhtar Ansari have been neutralised; and the mafia ecosystem has been shaken. Infrastructure projects, expressways, and investments have moved forward alongside the bulldozer drive.

Yet this very language has also generated deep controversy and polarisation. Critics argue that it creates fear among minorities, heightens communal tensions, and erodes the courteous traditions of Indian democracy. They see it as majoritarian rhetoric that prioritises strongman imagery over inclusive governance.

I remain conflicted about this change. On the one hand, I admire the rare transparency — finally, a leader who rises above wordplay and speaks plainly. Such candour is uncommon in Indian politics. On the other hand, I worry whether this bluntness is further dividing society.

Yogi Adityanath's no-nonsense, plain-speaking style has redefined Indian politics in a fundamental way. Ordinary citizens love this language because it contains no deception and no false promises. They feel they have finally found a leader who can place a criminal in the dock without looking at caste or religion. Yogi's directness reassures the public that the rule of law is being applied in its true spirit — justice will be the same regardless of the offender's community.

This new idiom has become a model not just for Uttar Pradesh but for national politics. The question is no longer whether political language should be soft or harsh, but whether it is honest and effective. Yogi has proved that the courage to call a spade a spade can itself become a powerful political force.

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# Great Nicobar: Between strategic destiny and environmental responsibility



**KRIPA NAUTIYAL**

The renewed controversy surrounding the \$1,000 crore Great Nicobar holistic development project, triggered by Rahul Gandhi's recent visit to the island, has once again brought into focus a larger national dilemma: how should India balance environmental concerns with strategic imperatives in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific region? The debate is both necessary and healthy in a democracy. However, what is worrying is the manner in which some sections are attempting to portray the project solely as an ecological disaster while completely ignoring the island's immense strategic and economic significance for India's future maritime posture.

Having spent nearly five years in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands during my service years, I have often wondered why such a strategically located territory — situated near one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints — remained under-utilised for decades. Great Nicobar is not merely another remote island. It is India's southern sentinel at the mouth of the Malacca Strait, through which a substantial portion of global trade and nearly three-fourths of China's energy supplies transit every year. Any nation with long-term strategic vision would naturally seek to develop critical infrastructure in such a location. The proposed

project includes an international container transshipment terminal at Galathea Bay, a dual-use military-civil airport, power infrastructure, and an integrated township. Critics see environmental destruction; strategic thinkers see India finally awakening to maritime realities that regional powers have understood for decades.

One does not have to travel far to witness how geopolitics shapes island development. The Indonesian archipelago, located close to Great Nicobar, has undertaken extensive maritime and infrastructure expansion to secure its strategic interests and economic future. Across Southeast Asia, nations are rapidly building ports, logistics hubs, and surveillance infrastructure to strengthen their position in the Indo-Pacific competition. India cannot afford strategic hesitation while others consolidate influence around us.

This is particularly important in the present geopolitical environment, where maritime competition in the Indian Ocean Region is intensifying. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide India with a natural strategic advantage unmatched by any other regional power. To neglect this advantage would be strategically irresponsible.

At the same time, it would be equally irresponsible to dismiss genuine ecological and tribal concerns. Great Nicobar is ecologically fragile, falls in Seismic Zone V, and hosts rare biodiversity, including the endangered leatherback turtle. The Shompen and Nicobarese tribal communities possess unique cultural identities that deserve the highest degree of protection and sensitivity.

I have personally been fortunate to interact with the friendly and dignified Shompen tribals during



several visits to Great Nicobar. Their simplicity, self-sustaining lifestyle, and deep connection with nature leave a lasting impression on any visitor. Development cannot and should not become an excuse for cultural erasure or insensitive displacement. However, it is equally important not to romanticise isolation in a manner that permanently condemns such regions to underdevelopment and strategic irrelevance. History shows that large infrastructure projects inevitably involve some degree of displacement or ecological alteration. The real test of governance lies in how responsibly and humanely these challenges are managed. If rehabilitation becomes necessary, it must follow internationally accepted norms and ensure livelihood security, cultural continuity, healthcare, education, and dignified resettlement. Environmental safeguards too must remain scientific, transparent, and continuously monitored. Development and conservation need not always be opposing forces if approached with accountability. At the same time, opposition to the Great Nicobar project also reflects a larger lack of

strategic vision. In today's world, maritime infrastructure, island territories, logistics hubs, and surveillance systems are central to national security. India cannot afford to remain strategically constrained in the Indo-Pacific region. I am reminded here of a deeply unfortunate episode from my own professional experience concerning Narcondam Island. Based on operational recommendations, the government had approved the installation of a radar system on this strategically located island as part of our maritime domain awareness and static sensor chain.

The proposal had received clearance from the Ministry of Defence because of its immense importance for maritime surveillance. However, in 2012, under pressure from certain environmental groups and NGOs, the proposal was rejected by the Environment Ministry on the grounds that the island's hornbill population might face regenerative issues due to radar installation in a very small corner of the island. Consequently, the radar had to be shifted elsewhere, leading to significant maritime surveillance gaps in a strategically sensitive region.

This episode remains a classic example of how excessive bureaucratic caution and narrowly framed environmental objections can sometimes undermine national security interests. Some experts believe that non-approval of this radar was due to pressure from certain external powers through some voluntary groups. Environmental protection is undoubtedly essential, but strategic blindness can prove equally dangerous.

India today stands at a crucial strategic crossroads. The Indo-Pacific is rapidly emerging as the epicentre of global power competition. China's

maritime expansion, port acquisitions, dual-use infrastructure projects, and naval outreach across the Indian Ocean are no longer speculative concerns; they are visible realities. In such an environment, strengthening the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is not an option but a necessity.

The Great Nicobar project should therefore not be viewed through the simplistic binary of "development versus environment". It must instead be approached as a national mission requiring balance, scientific planning, transparency, environmental sensitivity, and strategic clarity. Constructive criticism is valuable. Alarmism that paralyses national initiatives is not. India's strategic planners must ensure robust ecological safeguards, protect tribal rights, and minimise environmental damage. Yet the nation must also recognise that opportunities of this magnitude are rare, and countries rise by anticipating future geopolitical realities.

Great Nicobar offers India a major opportunity to strengthen its maritime security, expand regional influence, generate employment, and project power responsibly in the Indo-Pacific. Debate must continue, but with strategic maturity rather than emotional absolutism. National development, environmental stewardship, and tribal welfare are not mutually exclusive. With political will and careful planning, India can achieve all three together.

The author is a retired Additional Director General of the Indian Coast Guard and has served in the Andaman and Nicobar region for five years in various capacities, including Commander of the entire region

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**Order Order**

**Delhi HC gives nod to four-way kidney swap transplant**

The Delhi High Court has given its nod to a multi-way swap kidney transplant in which four patients with chronic renal disease would receive the organ from each other's close relatives. Justice Purushendra Kaurav said that the decision of a private hospital's authorisation committee as well as the appellate authority under the Union Health Ministry to reject the proposal was contrary to the intent of the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994. Observing that a restrictive interpretation of the law would defeat its purpose to provide access to life-saving transplants, the court directed the hospital's authorisation committee to expeditiously approve the four-way transplant subject to medical and ethical protocols. The court passed the order on May 26 on a petition by eight individuals – four recipients and their willing close-relative donors who had positive "cross-match results" that made the swap possible. It was proposed that each donor would give a kidney to a compatible recipient in the chain, enabling all four patients to receive the organ. The authorisation committee, however, rejected the proposal in February on the grounds of non-exhaustion of near-relative donor evaluation, absence of express statutory provision for multi-pair swaps and the lack of exceptional clinical justification. It was also stated that the possibility of financial inducement cannot be ruled out in such a scenario.



**SC seeks Centre, NCERT reply on CBSE's 3-language rule plea**

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New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to examine a plea challenging a CBSE policy mandating the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, for Class 9 students beginning July 1. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued notices to the Centre, CBSE and the NCERT and sought their



replies within two weeks. According to a recent circular issued by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, has been made compulsory for Class 9 students beginning July 1. The move is part of the CBSE's alignment of its scheme of studies with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023.

**SC refuses ex-NCLAT member's plea to practise before tribunal**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain a plea filed by former National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) technical member challenging a regulation that prohibits former tribunal members from practising before the National Company Law Tribunal and the NCLAT. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi told petitioner Vijai Pratap Singh that the issue pertains to "independence of



judiciary" and the prayer cannot be allowed. "You have to think about independence of judiciary. You have been a member of the tribunal. It is a super special tribunal. Imagine you appear before another member who was working when you were there.

**Time-stamping on VVPAT slips technical matter in ECI's domain: SC**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday left to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to take a decision on a plea seeking a direction to the poll panel to modify VVPAT guidelines so that each slip displays the precise time at which a vote was cast. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said the PIL for recording the precise time of vote on Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail



(VVPAT) slips for better electoral transparency and verifiability was a technical matter and falls within the ambit of the poll panel. "It seems that the issue

raised by the petitioner concerns electoral integrity. However, the prayer sought by the petitioner, namely, whether such a measure is feasible, is a technical issue falling within the domain of the EC," the bench said, disposing of the plea. The bench directed the registry to forward the plea to the EC, which in turn could consider it. According to the PIL, time-stamping on VVPAT slips would improve transparency, verifiability and auditability of the electoral process.

**SC sets aside NCLAT order which rejected Amazon's appeal**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday set aside the NCLAT's June 2022 order which had rejected US e-commerce giant Amazon's appeal against an anti-trust suspension of its investment deal with Future Group. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta also set aside the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) December 17, 2021 order which had levied a ₹202 crore penalty on Amazon and suspended its



deal with Future. "In view of the findings recorded above, the appeal is allowed. The impugned judgement dated June 13, 2022 passed by the NCLAT and order dated December 17, 2021 passed by the CCI are set

**Collegium recommends 4 HC chief justices, V Mohana as SC judge**

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New Delhi

The Supreme Court collegium on Wednesday recommended the elevation of chief justices of four high courts and senior advocate V Mohana as judges of the apex court. According to a statement uploaded on the top court's website, the collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, held its meetings on May 22 and May 27.



It has recommended the elevation of Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice of Bombay High Court Shree Chandrashekhar, Chief Justice of Madhya Pradesh High Court Sanjeev Sachdeva, Chief Justice of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh Arun Palli and Mohana as judges of the top court. The apex court presently has 32 judges, including the CJI. Two sitting judges of the top court are set to retire next month.

**Byju's founder sentenced to jail in Singapore, says order is 'procedural'**



A Singapore court sentenced Byju Raveendran, founder of Byju's, to six months in jail for contempt of court over alleged non-compliance with disclosure orders, but the entrepreneur said the ruling was "procedural" and that he plans to appeal. The ruling marks the most serious legal setback yet for the founder of Byju's, once one of India's most valuable startups, which has been battling investor disputes, debt litigation and operational turmoil following a sharp post-pandemic downturn. The court ordered Raveendran to surrender himself to authorities, pay legal costs of Singapore dollar 90,000 (USD 70,500) and produce documents relating to his ownership of Beear Investco Pte, a Singapore entity that held shares in an affiliated company. It was not immediately clear whether Raveendran was in Singapore at the time of the order. His lawyers said they are contemplating an appeal against the decision and applying for a stay of the order. The case was brought by a subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority, which invested in Byju's during a funding round as the company was grappling with layoffs and mounting financial pressure. The contempt proceedings add to broader legal battles surrounding Byju's, including ongoing litigation in the United States where lenders are seeking to recover losses tied to a USD 1.2 billion term loan.

**Delhi HC denies bail to mother-in-law in dowry death case**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has refused to grant bail to a mother-in-law in a dowry death case following the death by suicide of her 19-year-old daughter-in-law eight months after the wedding. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma observed that a young life was lost under tragic circumstances and harassment had allegedly reached a stage where the deceased believed that the only escape from the conduct of her husband and in-laws was to take her own life. The deceased was found hanging in her matrimonial home in

November 2024. Her family complained that the husband and the in-laws subjected her to physical and mental harassment for not fulfilling their demand of Rs 3 lakh as dowry. The recording of a call between the deceased and her brother a few hours before she took her life revealed that the husband used abusive and threatening language against her, tore her clothes after a quarrel and threatened to parade her naked on the streets. Dismissing the bail plea by the mother-in-law on May 25, Justice Sharma said since the forensic report on a conclusive cause of death was still awaited and material witnesses were yet to be exam-



ined before the trial court, releasing the present accused was not in the interest of justice, especially when there was a possibility of influencing the witnesses. "The present case reflects a disturbing reality of society where, even today, a young

girl aged about 19 years is alleged to have been driven to commit suicide because her parents were unable to fulfil an unlawful demand of Rs 3 lakh allegedly raised by her in-laws, including the present applicant, merely on account of her marriage into their family," the court observed. "A young life has been lost under tragic circumstances. The material collected during the investigation, including the audio conversation between the deceased and her brother wherein she is heard crying and narrating the incident of being threatened with being paraded naked, when read together with the allegations of persistent harassment on account of non-fulfilment of dowry demands, lends seriousness to the allegations levelled against the applicant," it further said. The mother-in-law claimed that the call recording between the deceased

and her brother clearly reflected that she was disturbed because of a quarrel with her husband over an Instagram chat with another girl and not due to any alleged demand for dowry. It was also said that the mother-in-law was neither present at the time of the quarrel nor at the time when the deceased allegedly died by suicide. Justice Sharma, however, asserted that according to the Supreme Court, in cases involving the alleged dowry death of a young bride within a short span of marriage, courts must exercise greater caution and undertake careful scrutiny of the surrounding circumstances.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

**Trial in Manipur ethnic violence cases needs to be expedited: SC**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said that the ongoing trial in the 2023 Manipur ethnic violence needs to be expedited and sought a status report from authorities. Ethnic violence in Manipur broke out on May 3, 2025, after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts. The protest was held against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The violence claimed over 260 lives and left thousands of people displaced. On Wednesday, a bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi noted that, according to a SIT report, chargesheets had been filed in 207 cases against more than 400 accused. Referring to a CBI report, the bench said that 20 chargesheets had been filed and trials had commenced in 16 cases, while, according to the SIT status report, chargesheets had been filed in 207 cases against over 400 accused. "We are of the view



that the ongoing trial needs to be expedited. We have asked the CBI and others to provide legal aid counsel who are well-versed in Manipuri to counsel the victims...The status of the ongoing trial must be filed in the next hearing," it said. At the outset, the bench said that the matter was to be heard regarding the issue of providing legal aid to victims' families and that it would not interfere with other issues. Referring to a CBI report, the bench said that 20 chargesheets had been filed and trials had commenced in 16 cases, while, according to the SIT status report, chargesheets had been filed in 207 cases against over 400 accused. The bench also noted that, according to a report filed by former IPS officer Dattatray Padsalgikar, the law and order situation in the state was "precarious" on April 7 and 18 this year with some incidents of violence and the state police were stressed. The bench also said that the victims' faith in the system was of key importance and that "confidence-building measures" with them were needed. On September 8, 2025, the Gauhati High Court granted bail to the two accused on the grounds that they had been in custody for two years while charges were yet to be framed, and termed it to be "unjustified prolonged incarceration".

**CJI thanks outgoing SC judges Justices Maheshwari, Mithal for dedicated service**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Wednesday paid a glowing tribute to outgoing Supreme Court judges Justices J K Maheshwari and Pankaj Mithal, and thanked them for their years of dedicated service. Both Justice Maheshwari and Justice Mithal will retire during the partial court working days (June 1 to July 12) in the apex court. While Justice Maheshwari is set to retire on June 28, Justice Mithal will demit office on June 16. The CJI was speaking at a function organised by the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association (SCAORA) to bid farewell to Justices Maheshwari and Mithal. "They (Justices Maheshwari and Mithal) showed us that authority need not create distance and that high offices need not separate a person from the places and values that shaped him," the CJI said.



"On behalf of my colleagues on the bench, on behalf of the institution, on

behalf of everyone who is present here and those who are joining us online, I thank brother Maheshwari, I thank brother Mithal for their years of dedicated service given with dignity, integrity, restraint and conviction," he said. Speaking at the function, Justice Maheshwari said any judicial office is temporary and eventually ends, but a judge's professional credibility, the memory of how they treat the lawyer who stood before them, survives. "In our culture, we often speak of 'dharma', but the judicial 'dharma' is not about religion. It is about constitutional morality. It is about unwavering commitment to the public trust. But it can only be possible with the assistance of the members of the bar..." he said. Justice Maheshwari said he owes a debt of gratitude to the members of the bar who have educated him, challenged him, and kept him sharp during his time here sitting on various benches.

**SC upholds 28% GST on online gaming with retrospective effect**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the government's retrospective levy of 28 per cent GST on online gaming companies and observed that such imposition was constitutionally valid. A bench comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said online gaming platforms are not mere intermediaries but are to be treated as suppliers amenable to the Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime on



levies and taxes. "Online gaming activities, including fantasy sports and other games played on digital platforms, involving staking upon uncertain outcomes, constitute betting and gambling for the purpose of GST framework," the bench said. "The levy of GST on the supply of actionable claims arising from betting and gambling is constitutionally valid and does not transgress Articles 366(12) and 366(12A) of the Constitution," the apex court said in its judgment. The top court also upheld the validity of laws enacted by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments which banned online games played for stakes, including games of skill such as rummy and poker. GST authorities in October 2023 issued show cause notices to online gaming companies for tax evasion. The government amended the GST law, making it mandatory for overseas online gaming companies to register in India from October 1, 2023 onwards.



**ONGC bets on gas-led growth as premium prices lift profit**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n New Delhi

State-run oil and gas producer ONGC said it expects natural gas to become an increasingly dominant and profitable part of its business as new high-priced gas production ramps up and domestic demand continues to rise.

Speaking at an investor call, ONGC chairman and CEO Arun Kumar Singh said the company now produces and sells more gas than oil, with gas contributing higher earnings because of favourable pricing reforms and lower handling costs.

"New well gas" production from newly drilled wells that

receive pricing linked to 12 per cent of crude oil prices - accounted for roughly 20 per cent of gas volumes last year and is expected to rise to 25-30 per cent this year before climbing further over the next few years.

"At crude prices of around USD 90 a barrel, new well gas realises nearly USD 10.8 per million British thermal unit in the domestic market," he said, adding that India was among the highest-paying gas markets globally for such production.

The company said older gas fields priced at lower administered rates were gradually being replaced by higher-priced output from new wells, improving overall



profitability. ONGC expects gas production growth of 7-8 per cent annually, driven by projects including the Daman field development project, the DSF block and ramp-up at the KG-98/2 deepwater block. Singh said four wells under

the Daman project had already been opened, with total gas production expected to rise progressively as additional wells come online.

ONGC, he said, was executing projects worth about Rs 33,000 crore in western off-

shore fields aimed at sustaining and increasing production. Western offshore assets account for around 60 per cent of ONGC's oil production and 70 per cent of gas output.

It has recently expanded its partnership with BP plc for production enhancement projects across western offshore assets, after earlier assigning Mumbai High redevelopment work to the company.

Singh said production at the company's KG-98/2 block in the Bay of Bengal had faced geological challenges but added that it now had "full handle" on the issues and expected output stabilisation measures to improve performance.

ONGC also highlighted improving prospects at its overseas unit, ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL).

The company said production from Russia's Sakhalin project had recovered to near pre-Ukraine-war levels, while Mozambique LNG development was progressing rapidly, with first LNG targeted around 2028.

It also expects higher output from Venezuela operations under the current US administration, subject to licensing approvals.

Beyond hydrocarbons, ONGC said its renewable energy portfolio was nearing 3 gigawatts through acquisitions and ongoing expansion under ONGC Green Ltd.

**Rise Infra ventures FY26 revenue grows 46 per cent**



Real estate consultant Rise Infra ventures on Wednesday said its revenue rose 46 per cent to ₹120 crore during the 2025-26 fiscal on higher brokerage income from the sale and lease of housing and commercial properties.

The company's revenue stood at ₹82 crore in the 2024-25 financial year.

Established in 2021, Gurugram-based Rise Infra ventures facilitates the sale of housing and commercial properties on behalf of real estate developers. It is also into leasing of office and retail spaces.

"We facilitated the sale of properties worth ₹4,840 crore during the 2025-26 fiscal as against ₹3,856 crore in the preceding year," Rise Infra ventures founder and CEO Sachin Gawri told reporters here.

He said the Gurugram property market contributed more than 50 per cent to the total value of properties transacted during the last fiscal.

The company has a presence in six cities, including Gurugram, Noida, Bengaluru and Mumbai, with 300 employees.

Gawri said the company would expand its business into more cities in India. It is also looking to enter the Dubai market once the situation stabilises in the West Asia region.

Rise Infra ventures has set a target to achieve ₹200 crore revenue this fiscal, he said, adding that the company is also looking at scaling up with more services. On the overall market conditions in Delhi-NCR, he said the demand has stabilised after rising sharply between 2022 and 2025.

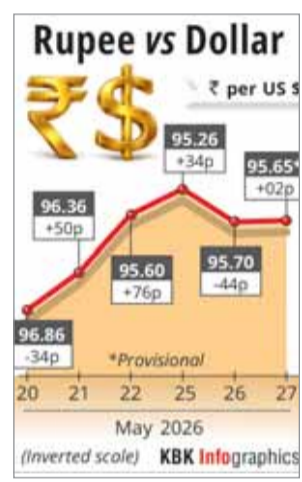
Gawri said the housing prices in the primary market (first sale) would not fall despite global uncertainties, rather would rise at a slower pace. (PTI)

**Rupee rises 2 paise to 95.68 against USD**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n Mumbai

The rupee settled on a flat note, higher by 2 paise at 95.68 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as renewed tensions between the US and Iran and delays in negotiations kept investors cautious.

Forex traders said a strong American currency and weak domestic markets also pressured the rupee. Attention has shifted toward the upcoming RBI Monetary Policy Committee meeting scheduled between June 3 and 5,



they said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 95.60 against the US dollar, and touched an intra-day low of 95.79 against the American currency.

At the end of Wednesday's close, the rupee was quoted at 95.68 (provisional), down 2 paise from its previous closing. On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 44 paise to close at 95.70 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on renewed tensions between the US and Iran and concerns over military action in the Middle East.

**Insurance sector may face impact if West Asia crisis prolongs: LIC chief**

**KUMAR DIPANKAR**  
n New Delhi

The insurance sector may witness some moderation if the Middle East crisis persists for a longer period, as it could reduce people's income levels, LIC CEO and MD R Doraiswamy said.

"We are all going through a very tough time as already communicated by our Prime Minister. The country has been showing a good amount of resilience and



so far has protected the end consumer from the complete impact of the West Asia crisis," he told PTI in an interview. But in case the

crisis continues for a longer time, he said, "It will certainly have a cascading impact on individuals, affecting both their spending and saving patterns. We hope the crisis is resolved at the earliest so that the situation returns to normalcy as quickly as possible. That is what we are looking forward to."

He further said if the broader segment of economy is impacted, the insurance industry cannot remain isolated. (PTI)

**India toll growth to ease 5-7% on West Asia conflict: Crisil**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n New Delhi

India's toll collection growth is likely to moderate to 5-7 per cent in the current fiscal as the West Asia conflict and geopolitical uncertainties are weighing on freight movement and industrial activity, rating agency Crisil said on Wednesday.

According to Crisil, the percolating economic impact of the West Asia conflict and a consequent deceleration in commercial traffic is likely to result in an on-year moderation in toll collection by 150-200 basis points (bps) this fiscal.

Crisil noted that the marginal underperformance is temporary and is likely to be recouped next fiscal, due to relatively higher toll rate hikes compelled by inflationary pressures.

To be sure, the rating agency said the toll rate hike in a fiscal year is based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation of the previous year.

This underscores the resilience of toll road assets through economic cycles. Healthy operating performance and controlled leverage should keep the credit profiles of toll road operators stable, it said.

Crisil Ratings deputy chief ratings officer Manish Gupta said, "traffic growth, a function of economic expansion, is estimated at 2-4 per cent in the near term. The modest WPI inflation of last year will limit toll rate hikes this fiscal year, and consequently, toll collection will grow 5-7 per cent."

However, next fiscal toll rates may see a steeper increase due to higher WPI



inflation, expected this fiscal amid the West Asia conflict. This will drive toll collection growth to 8-10 per cent next fiscal, Gupta added.

According to the rating agency, commercial traffic remains the backbone of toll collection, typically contributing 75 per cent.

Freight movement is closely linked to industrial output, construction activity

and mining, which may be impacted amid the West Asia conflict — as reflected in sequential degrowth in fastag toll collections in March and April.

Crisil said that significant weakening in the macro-economic environment amid the West Asia conflict, particularly affecting commercial traffic, will warrant close monitoring.

**Wheat output seen up 2.29% at 120.65 million tonnes in FY26: Govt**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n New Delhi

The country's wheat production is projected to rise by 2.29 per cent to 120.65 million tonnes for the 2025-26 crop year (July-June), notwithstanding localised damage caused due to unseasonal rains and hailstorms, according to government data released on Wednesday.

The projection is in line with the agriculture ministry's pre-weather estimate of 120.21 million tonnes for 2025-26, which itself was higher than 117.94 million tonnes recorded in 2024-25.

"Wheat production is estimated at 120.65 million tonnes, which is 27.12 lakh



tonnes higher than last year," the agriculture ministry said, releasing the third estimate of major agricultural crops for 2025-26.

The ministry had always maintained that the country's wheat production remains "stable and resilient despite localised damage" caused by unseasonal rainfall and hailstorms.

**US team to visit India from June 1-4 for trade talks**



The US team is visiting India from June 1-4 to finalise the details of the interim trade pact and take forward negotiations under the broader bilateral trade agreement on various areas such as market access, non-tariff measures, and customs facilitation, a government official said on Wednesday.

India and the US issued a joint statement on February 7, agreeing on a framework for an interim trade agreement on reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade.

The framework reaffirmed the countries' commitment to the broader India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA) negotiations.

Following that, the Indian side visited Washington DC on April 20-23, 2026, for an in-person round of meetings with their US counterparts.

"To carry forward the discussions, the US team led by the Chief Negotiator will be visiting India from June 1-4, 2026. It is proposed to finalise the details of the interim agreement and take forward the negotiations under the broader BTA on multiple areas such as market access, non-tariff measures, customs and trade facilitation, investment promotion, economic security alignment," the official said. (PTI)

**MFI portfolio dips 9% in April on pvt banks' cautious stance: Report**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n Mumbai

The microfinance industry's outstanding portfolio declined by 9 per cent in the year to April 2026 due to heightened caution among private banks, a credit information company said on Wednesday.

In what can bring some cheer to the industry battling a host of challenges on asset quality for over a year, assets unpaid for over 30 days declined to 2.5 per cent in April 2026 from 6.4 per cent in the year-ago period.

The report by Equifax said the overall portfolio declined 9 per cent to ₹3.34 lakh crore in April.

The number of active loans



moderated sharply by 21 per cent to 10.28 crore, indicating a preference for lending larger amounts in the industry. The non-bank lenders showed a better asset-quality trend, and the same cohort also witnessed industry-beating performance on loan outstandings, which were down by 4 per cent in the

period, the report said.

The market share of NBFC-MFIs grew to 43 per cent from 39 per cent in the year-ago period and the same for NBFCs grew to 14 per cent from 12 per cent.

Small finance banks maintained their 15 per cent market share during the same period, it said.

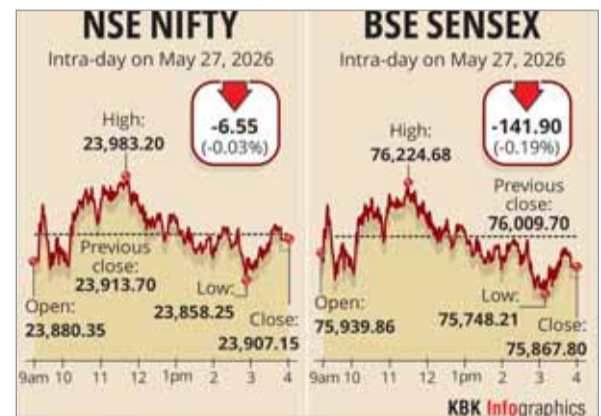
**Stock markets decline for 2nd day on selling in energy, banking shares; Sensex down 142 points**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n Mumbai

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower in a volatile trade on Wednesday as investors remained cautious amid conflicting geopolitical signals from the West Asia and fresh foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 141.90 points, or 0.19 per cent, to settle at 75,867.80, with 20 of its constituents ending higher and 10 with losses. During the day, it hit a high of 76,224.68 and a low of 75,748.21, gyrating 476.47 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty skidded 6.55 points to end at 23,907.15. Among 30 Sensex firms, HDFC Bank, Infosys, ITC,



Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries and ICICI Bank were the major laggards.

Power Grid, Eternal, NTPC and Tata Steel were the major gainers. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark,

dropped 3.24 per cent to USD 96.35 per barrel. Indian equity markets ended largely subdued as investors adopted a wait-and-watch approach amid conflicting geopolitical signals from the Middle East.

**CCPA acts on illegal online sale of explosives and chemicals on e-commerce platforms**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n New Delhi

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has initiated regulatory action against the unauthorised online listing, advertisement, and sale of hazardous chemicals and explosive substances on digital platforms, and issued eight notices to e-commerce entities, the regulator said on Wednesday.

The action was initiated following inputs regarding the online listing and sale of regulated substances on platforms, including IndiaMART, Justdial, Sigma-Aldrich India, Dial4Trade, and ExportersIndia.



The notices seek details on seller information and licensing compliance, buyer verification mechanisms, quantities sold, import details, and applicable regulatory approvals.

Substances flagged include ammonium nitrate, gun

powder, picric acid, and pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) -- all of which are regulated, restricted, or prohibited under various laws governing public safety and hazardous substance handling.

"Unauthorised online access to such hazardous

substances may expose consumers to serious safety risks and unlawful supply channels," the authority said in a statement.

During its preliminary examination, the CCPA observed that several of these substances were being listed or advertised without the requisite safeguards or verification mechanisms, potentially posing risks to public safety and national security.

The authority has underlined that online platforms and intermediaries must exercise due diligence and ensure strict compliance with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements before permitting the listing or sale of such substances.

**Tax relief, import curbs can shield India from war crisis: Report**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
n New Delhi

India needs to undertake measures such as tax moderation to boost export competitiveness, targeted import curbs on non-essential and demerit goods, and time-bound enforcement of trade-remedy measures to shield itself from the impact of the West Asia crisis, a report said.

The global economic landscape faces a profound stress test and geopolitical volatility in West Asia is driving structural cost-push inflation across essential sectors — energy, agriculture, and manufacturing, according to a report by Think Change Forum.

"The traditional fiscal response — relying on open-



ended subsidies to buffer these shocks — is no longer sustainable. It creates a moral hazard by shielding firms from global volatility through perpetual subsidies, the policy disincentivises the structural efficiency and vertical integration necessary for global competitiveness," it said.

This report proposes a strategic pivot — replacing blunt subsidy-led interventions with a precise, three-pillar framework of structural tax moderation and defensive trade alignment.

By dismantling inverted duty structures, calibrating tariffs dynamically, and restricting non-merit luxury

imports, India can secure its domestic industrial base while maintaining fiscal discipline, it said, adding that this is a transition from reactive relief to proactive macro-economic fortification.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently emphasised, it said, reducing the import of non-essential goods is no longer an austerity measure — it is a cornerstone of national security and foreign exchange resilience.

India's merchandise imports touched USD 774.98 billion in 2025-26 against exports of USD 441.78 billion, creating a trade deficit exceeding USD 333 billion, as per the data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.



## FROM THE WORLD

### UK Indian-origin doctor suspended

An Indian-origin neurosurgeon has been suspended for eight months by a UK medical tribunal for having a sexual relationship with one of his patients and prescribing medication while allegedly being "blackmailed" by her. Dr Chirag Patel was employed by a National Health Service (NHS) hospital in Cardiff, Wales. He told the UK's General Medical Council that he is "deeply regretful" of his misconduct relating to Patient A, whom he had medically treated between 2019 and 2021. "In light of all the circumstances of this particular case, the tribunal concluded that a period of eight months' suspension is the appropriate and proportionate sanction," reads a Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service report, released recently following a hearing last month.

### CANADA Carney shuns US planes

Canada will buy early warning radar planes built by Sweden's Saab and Canada's Bombardier over two American options, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced on Wednesday. Carney said his government has entered negotiations to procure Saab's Airborne Early Warning & Control Aircraft, which is built on the Canadian-manufactured Bombardier Global 6500 aircraft and will support domestic production. Carney also noted it is made with 20% US content. The federal government has previously said it's in the market for six radar aircraft. Canada joined a major European Union defence fund last year, and Carney has made a point of diversifying its military spending away from the United States. Equipped with powerful radar, the Saab planes provide situational awareness about aircraft and missile movements for hundreds of miles.

## China slams Quad over maritime meddling

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
n Beijing

China on Wednesday reacted strongly to the Quad Ministerial meeting that voiced serious concerns over the situation in the East and South China Sea, saying they should stop meddling in maritime affairs in its neighbourhood.

The situation in the East China Sea and the South China Sea is generally stable, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here while responding to a question on the Quad meeting in Delhi. Foreign Ministers of Quad countries, comprising the US, India, Japan and Australia, explicitly voiced



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning

serious concerns over the situation in the East and South China Sea on Tuesday and denounced coercive actions threatening regional peace and stability, without directly naming China. "Certain countries should stop meddling in maritime affairs in China's neighbour-

hood and earnestly respect regional countries' efforts to safeguard peace and stability," Mao said.

"Those who attempt to patch up small groupings, hype up tensions and stoke confrontation will find no support," she added.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its own, while the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims. In the East China Sea, Beijing has a maritime dispute with Tokyo over the uninhabited islets called Senkakus, controlled by Japan. China calls them the Diaoyu Islands.

The Quad meeting was chaired by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and

attended by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi.

Mao on Tuesday reiterated China's opposition to the Quad, saying that Beijing is opposed to the formation of exclusive groupings and engaging in bloc confrontation. "Cooperation between countries should be conducive to regional peace, stability and prosperity, and not target any third party," Mao said. "We oppose forming exclusive groupings or engaging in bloc confrontation," she said.

China has been opposing the Quad alliance, terming it as Asian NATO aimed at containing its rise.

## Russian banks to join fight against Ukrainian drones

ASSOCIATED PRESS n Kyiv

Russian bank staff and branches could be joining the fight against Ukrainian drone attacks under an ambitious plan approved by the country's lower house of parliament.

The banks would bear the cost of installing electronic jamming systems on their premises while selected employees would shoot down incoming drones, according to the draft bill passed in its third and final reading on Tuesday.

Since there are banks in almost every town, their incorporation in air defences could help expand Russia's cover. The bill, which state news agency Interfax said



was first presented last August and later expanded in scope, must still be approved by the upper house Federation Council and signed by President Vladimir Putin before coming into force. Russia is finding it hard to protect its large land mass from a growing number of attacks by increasingly sophisticated Ukrainian long-range drones.

## US will need years to replenish weapons used in Iran war, analysis finds

BEN FINLEY n Washington

US military contractors need at least three years to replenish stockpiles of three key weapons systems used heavily in the Iran war, according to an analysis released on Wednesday, adding to concerns that American forces would have limited firepower in any future conflict with China.

The weapons systems are Tomahawk cruise missiles, which are used to strike targets deep inside enemy territory, and Patriot and THAAD interceptors that defend against incoming missiles and drones.

"The United States has enough munitions for any plausible scenario in the Iran war, but the depleted inventories have created a window of vulnerability for a potential Western Pacific conflict,"



Pete Hegseth

the Centre for Strategic and International Studies said in its new report. "The time needed to rebuild those inventories has thus become a major concern."

China has a stated goal of ensuring its military is capable of taking Taiwan by force if necessary by 2027, which experts see as more aspirational than a hard deadline. But Chinese President Xi Jinping

warned this month that if Washington mishandles its relations with the self-governing island, the US and China could end up clashing or even in open conflict.

The analysis by the Washington think tank factors in the Republican Trump administration's historic defence budget proposal of \$1.5 trillion for 2027, which significantly accelerates spending on high-end munitions that began during the Democratic Biden administration.

While there's bipartisan agreement in Congress to boost inventories, "the problem today isn't money; it's time," the report said.

"It takes time to expand production capacity and to build these complex systems," the report said, adding that the window of vulnerability will last "for several years until inventories return to their previous levels and another several

years before they get to the levels that war planners desire". Although munitions inventories are classified, CSIS said sufficient public information exists in Pentagon budget materials to estimate production timelines.

President Donald Trump and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth have insisted the US is capable of fighting any war. They have pushed defence contractors to speed up munitions production, with Hegseth telling lawmakers last month that military spending under Trump will help manufacturers double or even triple their capacities. Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement that the military "has everything it needs to execute at the time and place of the President's choosing". "We have executed multiple successful oper-

ations across combatant commands while ensuring the US military possesses a deep arsenal of capabilities to protect our people and our interests," Parnell said.

Some military experts have pushed back. Pentagon officials "knew the reality of our military stockpiles and hopefully told someone, Hey, if we go to this fight, even in the most conservative estimates, we are drawing down our stockpiles to a critical level," said Virginia Burger, a senior defence policy analyst at the Project On Government Oversight watchdog group and a former Marine officer.

Concerns about diminished stockpiles were a theme at recent congressional hearings. For Democrats, the munitions supply is a damning metric against the Iran war, which Trump launched without lawmakers' approval. (AP)

## Brutal acts cannot weaken Pakistan's resolve against terrorists: Asim Munir

SAJJAD HUSSAIN  
n Islamabad

Pakistan Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir on Wednesday said that "brutal and inhuman" acts cannot weaken the resolve of his country against terrorists.

Munir made the comments during a visit to Zhob district of Balochistan to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha with frontline troops deployed along the Western frontiers.

His remarks came days after 24 people were killed and dozens wounded when a powerful explosion ripped through a shuttle train in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province. The banned Baloch Liberation



Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to the army, Munir's visit commenced with Eid prayers along with special supplications for Pakistan's enduring peace, stability and prosperity. Referring to the recent terrorist incident in Quetta, the Field Marshal reaffirmed that such "inhuman and brutal acts cannot weaken the

resolve" of Pakistan Armed Forces or the nation, the statement read. He emphasised that the morale and resolve of troops and the people of Pakistan remained unshaken.

He reiterated that the Armed Forces, in close coordination with law enforcement agencies and the people of Balochistan, would continue to pursue all facilitators, abettors and perpetrators of terrorism with full force. Extending Eid greetings to officers and soldiers, the Field Marshal commended their exceptional grit, unwavering resolve, operational preparedness and steadfast vigilance amid foreign-sponsored terrorism.

## South Africa denies US white people humanitarian crisis claim

MICHELLE GUMEDE n Johannesburg

The Government in South Africa and Afrikaner advocacy groups on Wednesday rejected the position of the Trump administration that there's a humanitarian emergency affecting white people in South Africa.

The argument served as the rationale for raising the US refugee cap, but only for white Afrikaners.

The Trump administration said Tuesday that it will admit an additional 10,000 white South Africans into the US as refugees this year, increasing its annual cap, but blocking people from other countries from entering through the programme. US President Donald Trump's announcement on the Federal Register that he was increasing the refugee cap because of "an unforeseen emergency refugee situation". He blamed the South African government for "recent increases in the incitement of



racially motivated violence," but Trump gave no specific information.

The South African government's international relations department said Wednesday that accusations of systemic persecution of white Afrikaners are unfounded, pointing out that some beneficiaries of an immigration programme have chosen to return to South Africa. (AP)

## Ghana starts evacuating citizens from South Africa

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
n Johannesburg

The first group of around 300 Ghanaian nationals flew to their country on Wednesday as their government started a voluntary repatriation program for its citizens in response to anti-immigration tensions in South Africa.

Families and travellers gathered at the Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg with their luggage as officials and police coordinated the departure process. The repatriation follows renewed demonstrations over illegal immigration in parts of South Africa, where frustrations over unemploy-



ment, crime and access to services have fuelled tensions. Ghana's High Commissioner to South Africa, Benjamin Quashie, told reporters at the airport that more people than those on the registered list turned up to the airport.

He said their registration would be processed ahead of the next flight to Ghana, expected to depart Sunday.

## ICC trial for ex-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to start in November

MOLLY QUELL n The Hague

Judges at the International Criminal Court said on Wednesday that the trial of former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte for crimes against humanity will start on November 30.

According to prosecutors, the ex-leader is responsible for dozens of murders, allegedly overseeing deadly anti-drug crackdowns, first as mayor of the southern Philippine city of Davao and later as president. "The expediency of the trial is of the utmost importance," presiding Judge Joanna Korner said, rejecting requests from the registry of



the court to delay the start date over concerns about a lack of translators.

Duterte, who served as president from 2016 to 2022, was arrested in the Philippines last year and flown to The Hague, where

the global court is located. He denies the charges against him. Korner urged court staff to ensure interpretation was available into languages spoken in the Philippines, including Tagalog, English and French are the official languages of the court.

Estimates of the death toll during Duterte's presidential term vary, from more than 6,000 that the national police have reported to up to 30,000 claimed by human rights groups.

Duterte has not been present in the courtroom for any hearings, having waived his right to appear. Last month judges found he was

fit to stand trial, after postponing an earlier hearing over concerns about his health.

Earlier this month, the court unsealed an arrest warrant for Ronald Marapona dela Rosa, who served as national police chief under Duterte and helped carry out his anti-drug crackdowns in which thousands of mostly petty suspects were killed.

Dela Rosa has gone into hiding following a standoff in the country's Senate building that included gunfire. He is being hunted by Philippine authorities, who have vowed to turn him over to the court. (AP)

## US deported Cubans, Venezuelans to danger in Mexico: Rights group

ANNA-CATHERINE BRIGIDA  
n Mexico City

The Trump administration has deported nearly 13,000 Cubans, Venezuelans and other nationals to Mexico, where they are vulnerable to cartel violence in an unfamiliar country, a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) released on Wednesday said.

While Mexico has accepted these types of deportations for years, the deportees under the Trump administration are older and have lived in the US for longer than in the past, making it more difficult for them to find work and increasing the urgency of the need for medical care.

The report, which is based on more than 50 interviews in the southern Mexican cities Tapachula and Villahermosa, comes as US President Donald Trump has expanded immigration enforcement to carry out his mass deportation plan. This has meant that immigrants who were not previously targeted, such as Cubans with years or decades living in the US, have been caught up in the immigration dragnet.

Some countries, such as Cuba and Venezuela, limit deportation flights or don't accept deportees at all, so they are instead sent to Mexico or other countries with which the US has struck deals. "Imagine being 60 or 70 years old, uprooted from your life overnight and sent



to a country you don't know, where authorities leave you out to dry without access to even the most basic services - shelter, healthcare. Imagine being dropped in dangerous cities with nothing but the clothes on your back," said Alcira Hava, Leonard H. Sandler Fellow at Human Rights Watch, who worked on the report.

"That's the reality for many Cubans deported to Mexico," Hava said. Cubans represent the largest group sent to Mexico, according to the report, with more than 4,300 deported.

More than half the Cubans deported had a criminal record, but only 16 per cent were for violent crimes, according to the researchers. One-fourth had no criminal history. Most were detained at routine check-ins with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but some were detained at their workplace or in public spaces.

None were taken before a judge to contest their deportation to Mexico, even when they expressed fear for their safety. (AP)

## Muslims celebrate Eid al-Adha after Haj concludes in Saudi Arabia

BARAA ANWER/ MARIAM FAM  
n Mina

Masses of pilgrims in Saudi Arabia threw pebbles at a large pillar in a symbolic ritual on Wednesday, one of the final days of the Haj as Muslims around the world started celebrating the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha.

Pilgrims in Mina, Saudi Arabia, at the annual Islamic pilgrimage chanted "Allahu akbar," or God is great, while throwing pebbles in a ritual seen as a symbolic stoning of the devil. The act also is seen as a symbol of rejecting evil and a commemoration of the Prophet Ibrahim's rejection of temptation when the devil tried to dissuade him from submitting to God's will. Large crowds of pilgrims moved



Muslim pilgrims walking on their way to cast pebbles at pillars in the symbolic stoning of the devil, the last rite of the annual Haj, in Mina near the holy city of Mecca

through the sprawling Jamarat complex after arriving from Muzdalifah, where they collected pebbles overnight following a day of worship and prayer at Arafat on Tuesday. Pakistani pilgrim Aamar Shakur said he saw the pebble throwing as a symbol of confronting personal struggles in which he was "throwing the stone to my own devil."

The last days of the Haj in Saudi Arabia coincide with Eid al-Adha, or "Feast of Sacrifice," which marks the willingness of Ibrahim, known as Abraham to Christians and Jews, to sacrifice his son. During the holiday, Muslims typically slaughter sheep or cattle and distribute some of the meat to poor people.

The Haj, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is required once in a lifetime

of every Muslim who can afford it and is physically able. Performed over several days, the Haj can be a deeply moving spiritual experience and a chance to seek God's forgiveness.

This year, the physically demanding Haj has been held in intense heat, which appeared to take a toll on some as they moved between holy sites.

Medical teams stationed across Mina were seen treating several pilgrims. Many poured water over their heads and faces to cool themselves under the scorching sun, while others carried umbrellas. Some pushed elderly relatives and loved ones in wheelchairs through the crowds toward the pillars so they could complete the ritual. (AP)



## Israeli forces kill new Hamas leader in Gaza

WAFAA SHURAF/  
MELANIE LIDMAN  
n Deir Al-Balah

Israel said on Wednesday that it targeted and killed the new leader of Hamas' military wing during airstrikes in Gaza City less than two weeks after it killed his predecessor.

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz and the Israeli military said the strikes, which were carried out on Tuesday, killed Mohammed Odeh.

Family members of a man called Mohammed Odeh said he was killed in the strike, but did not confirm he was the leader of the military wing. Hamas has not commented. Katz called him "one of the architects" of the



October 7, 2023, attacks that triggered over two years of war in Gaza and said it was the fourth time Israel has killed the head of Hamas' military wing since that massacre. Izz al-Din al-Haddad, the previous head, was killed on May 16. At least three

people were killed and 12 injured in Tuesday's strike, which took place on the eve of Eid al-Adha, a major Muslim holiday.

"We pledged to eliminate everyone who led the October 7 massacre and this is what we will do: they are

all bound to die, everywhere," Katz wrote on X on Wednesday. "We pledged that Hamas will not hold civilian or military rule."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is preparing for elections in the fall, also threatened that Israel will target everyone involved in the October 7, 2023, attack.

### A grim Eid in Gaza

The attack came as Muslims prepared for Eid al-Adha, normally a joyous time of family gatherings and large meals.

The holiday once again is subdued this year in Gaza, where the vast majority of people remain displaced and live in tents or temporary shelters after a devastating

war. Around 90 per cent of Gaza's more than 2 million people have lost their homes, according to UN estimates, with most of them now sheltering in huge tent camps with rat infestations and pools of sewage. They are dependent on aid to survive.

Eid al-Adha, or "Feast of Sacrifice," is an Islamic holiday celebrated by millions of Muslims across the globe. The four-day holiday, which begins during the Hajj pilgrimage, is also known for being a joyous occasion during which families gather, and children are given new clothes and gifts.

"This is not Eid ... we're dead," said Mahmoud Saqer, a displaced man from Khan

Younis, who described people as being distressed by the ongoing human suffering and killings in the territory.

In Khan Younis and Gaza City, amid destroyed buildings, including a ruined mosque, people gathered for Eid prayers with few signs of celebration beyond a few clusters of balloons lining one street. Tahrir al-Khatib said the joy that accompanies Eid has been silenced in Gaza. "There's no Eid.

My children were killed. Eid is only for the people who lost no one," said Ayda Al-Banna, a displaced woman from Gaza, who prayed Eid Fragile ceasefire holds in Gaza A ceasefire reached between Israel and Hamas last October remains fragile. (AP)

## Climate change major challenge for Himalayas: Nepal President



SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
n Kathmandu

Sustainable tourism, responsible mountaineering and conservation of the Himalayan environment are the defining challenges of the day, Nepal's President Ramchandra Paudel said on Wednesday. Addressing the 'Everest Summiters Summit - 2026' organised in Kathmandu, Paudel said Mount Everest was not only a geographical identity of Nepal but also the pride, prestige and an invaluable natural heritage of the country. "The country's economy has benefitted from the tourism sector through the conservation, promotion, publicity and balanced use of these assets," he said.

Paudel stated that global warming, the impacts of climate change and the

accumulation of garbage in mountaineering areas have emerged as major challenges of the modern world.

"Addressing these issues and conserving the environment and biodiversity in the Everest region, while making mountaineering safe, sustainable and technology-friendly, requires additional efforts and cooperation from all sides," he said. He pointed out that conservation, promotion and balanced utilisation of Himalayan resources directly support Nepal's tourism industry and broader economic development.

Mukunda Prasad Niraula, secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, also expressed concerns about climate change and its impact on Mount Everest and other mountains of Nepal. (PTI)

## US military strike on alleged drug boat in eastern Pacific



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
n Washington

The US military launched another strike on Tuesday on a vessel suspected of transporting drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing one man and leaving two survivors. Video posted on social media by US Southern Command shows a boat speeding through water before exploding into flames. Southern Command said it "immediately notified the US Coast Guard to activate the Search and Rescue system for the survivors".

The Trump administration's campaign of blowing up alleged drug-trafficking

vessels in Latin American waters, including the eastern Pacific and the Caribbean Sea, has gone on since early September and killed at least 194 people in total. The military has not provided evidence that any of the vessels were carrying drugs. The Pentagon watchdog said last week that it will evaluate whether the US military followed an established targeting framework when carrying out the attacks on alleged drug-smuggling boats. The six-phase Joint Targeting Cycle includes a military commander's intent, target development, analysis, decision, execution and assessment.

## 5 found alive in flooded Laos cave; 2 still missing

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
n Bangkok

Five villagers stuck in a flooded cave in central Laos for more than a week were found alive, rescuers said Wednesday, but two others are missing.

The villagers entered the cave in Xaisomboun province on May 19, but heavy rain triggered flash flooding that blocked the exit and trapped seven people, according to Lao and Thai rescue teams involved in the operation.

Bounkham Luanglath of the Lao Organisation Rescue Volunteer for People, which has been working closely with local authorities in the rescue efforts, told said that



Metta Tham Rescue Kalasin, a rescuer is seen after removing people who have been trapped in a cave in Xaisomboun province, Laos. AP

five people were found safe and alive, but two more are still missing, and the search for them will continue.

"I'm still shaking. Our team made it happen," he said in a voice message. A video posted by a Thai rescue group involved in the mission appeared to show the moment divers emerged from the water and discovered the trapped villagers.

In the footage, the villagers, each wearing a headlamp, were sitting on a rock surrounded by floodwater. Other videos showed rescuers inside and outside the cave cheering, jumping around and hugging each other in joy after the discovery. Rescue workers from

neighbouring Thailand arrived at the site over the weekend.

The cave is located in a rugged, remote area in Xaisomboun province's in Vientiane.

Rescuers at the scene have detailed on social media the challenging mountainous terrain and heavy rain that have hampered their work.

Videos shared online by Thai rescuers showed that reaching the cave's entrance requires a steep hike of roughly 4 kilometres. The entrance is also steep and rocky, and barely wide enough for a single person at a time to climb through.

## Spanish police raid PM Sanchez's party headquarters



JOSEPH WILSON  
n Barcelona (Spain)

Spanish police are searching the headquarters of the ruling Socialist Party as part of an ongoing investigation into possible financial wrongdoing, the Civil Guard said Wednesday.

The raid on the office in central Madrid is another blow to the party of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose Socialists have been hammered by a series of corruption scandals.

The Civil Guard told The Associated Press that the police were under judicial orders to find material relevant to a National Court probe into accusations of corruption against former party members and other individuals.

The police said the search is strictly limited to a probe led by National Court judge Santiago Pedraz into the possible wrongdoing of Socialist party member Leire Diez. (AP)

## Berlin Police arrest suspected accomplice in Holocaust stabbing

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
n Berlin

An alleged accomplice of a man who was convicted of stabbing and seriously wounding a Spanish tourist at Berlin's Holocaust Memorial last year was arrested in the German Capital on Wednesday.

The Syrian national, identified only as Khalaf A. in line with German privacy rules, is suspected of being an accessory to attempted murder and bodily harm, federal



prosecutors said in a statement. They said that he spent the afternoon before the attack on February 21, 2025 with the man convicted of the stabbing, Wassim Al M., and encouraged him to carry out his plan.

Wassim Al M., also a Syrian citizen, was convicted in March on charges including attempted murder and attempted membership in a foreign terrorist organisation. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison. The Berlin district court found that he travelled from Leipzig to Berlin to carry out an attack in the name of the Islamic State group.

## Australian police plan to form heavily armed team in response to Bondi Beach massacre

ROD MCGUIRK n Melbourne

An Australian state police force has worked to form a heavily armed rapid response team since gunmen killed 15 people and wounded three police officers armed only with handguns at a Sydney Hanukkah celebration in December, a Government inquiry heard Wednesday.

Testifying before the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, which is investigating the spread of antisemitism in Australia ahead of the December 14 attack at Bondi Beach, New South Wales Police Deputy Commissioner David Hudson described a firepower imbalance.

The police force has responded with a plan to establish an Armed Response Command, equipped with semiautomatic rifles, and by reviving



a priority-resourced operation that focused on antisemitic crimes and retaliations against Muslim targets, Hudson said.

Rifles within the force have been largely restricted to two specialised paramilitary squads, he said.

Father and son Sajid and Naveed Akram allegedly opened fire with two shotguns and a hunting rifle on hundreds of people celebrating Hanukkah in a beachside park. Only

four police officers were present. They were armed with Glock pistols, which are only accurate for a short distance.

"On December 14, our police officers were placed at significant risk being in a gunfight armed with 9 mm Glocks against long arms," Hudson told the inquiry.

Within five minutes of the Akrams allegedly opening fire, 11 police officers had reached the scene. Three of those officers were among the dozens wounded in the massacre. Police shot the father dead and apprehended the wounded son less than eight minutes after the first shot was fired, the inquiry heard Monday.

In response to the shooting, police also revived Operation Shelter, which had been established in response to escalating community tensions days after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, Hudson said. (AP)

## China executes man convicted of poisoning 'The Three-Body Problem' gaming tycoon

SIMINA MISTREANU n Taipei (Taiwan)

Chinese authorities have executed a man convicted of using poison to kill a billionaire gaming tycoon linked to the Netflix adaptation of "The Three-Body Problem" over a professional dispute.

Xu Yao was found guilty of killing Lin Qi, the founder of the Shanghai-based Yoozoo Games, which holds the film adaptation rights for the blockbuster science-fiction trilogy known by the title of its first book, "The Three-Body Problem."

The sci-fi trilogy, by Chinese author Liu Cixin, has been translated into more than 40 languages and adapted into television and game productions including Netflix's popular "3 Body Problem" series released in 2024. Xu, the former head of a subsidiary of Yoozoo Games, poisoned Lin in 2020 over being sidelined by the founder shortly after Xu helped his superior land the Netflix deal. Xu was convicted in 2024, and Shanghai



business magazine Yicai Global and other outlets reported he was executed May 21. Lin's company confirmed the execution in a statement Tuesday on the Weibo social media platform. (AP)

## Hungary's parliament votes to remain member of ICC

JUSTIN SPIKE/  
MOLLY QUELL  
n Budapest

Hungary's parliament voted on Wednesday to remain a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), reversing a decision by the previous Government of Viktor Orban to withdraw from the global tribunal.

Orban's Government announced last year that Hungary would quit the ICC, the world's only permanent global court for war crimes and genocide, shortly after a state visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu which went ahead despite an ICC warrant for his arrest over alleged war crimes in connection with Israel's war in



the Gaza Strip. The ICC and other international organizations criticized Orban's Government for failing to detain Netanyahu. Orban accused the ICC of becoming a "political court." Hungary's withdrawal has been set to take effect on

June 2. The bill to reverse the decision, which was submitted on Monday by Prime Minister Peter Magyar, states that in order to maintain international peace and protect human rights "it is essential that those who commit the most serious

international crimes be held accountable before an international judicial forum."

It adds: "To this end, it is necessary to maintain Hungary's participation in the Statute of the International Criminal Court."

The bill was passed largely along party lines, with 133 lawmakers from Magyar's ruling Fidesz party voting to approve, 37 votes against and five abstentions.

The ICC's oversight body, the Assembly of States Parties, welcomed Hungary's return. In a statement on Monday in anticipation of the vote, the organization said it "congratulates the Government of Hungary for this important decision." (AP)

## In Congo displacement camp, fighting Ebola with sand, oatmeal and one thermometer but no water

JUSTIN KABUMBA/ MONIKA PRONCZUK  
n Bunia (Congo)

There is one handwashing station and one infrared thermometer to fight the Ebola epidemic in a camp for 10,000 displaced people in Bunia, a city at the heart of the outbreak in eastern Congo.

Camp leaders say they tell residents to wash their hands before eating - with soap for the lucky ones who have it. For the rest, the advice is to use oatmeal or sand. "My fear is that we are here with nothing to protect ourselves. We have no protection, no water or soap, and we live near garbage," Francine Leve Janguzi, a resident of the so-called ISP camp, said, as she opened an empty tap in a sea of tarpaulin roofs.

Supplies are being rushed to Ituri province as aid groups and healthcare workers try to stem an outbreak of the infectious disease that has been



declared a global health emergency.

But front-line responders are concerned the disease might spread to the large displacement camps located near Bunia, where thousands of people are crammed into limited space, without

access to basic hygiene. "Eastern DRC's years of conflict and displacement have left health systems on their knees, and that makes containing this outbreak all the harder," said Heather Kerr, Congo director with the International Rescue

Committee. Almost a million people have been displaced from their homes by conflict in Ituri, according to the UN.

That means this Ebola outbreak is "unfolding in communities already facing insecurity, displacement and fragile healthcare systems," said Gabriela Arenas, a regional coordinator at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The majority of residents of the ISP camp - which owes its name to its proximity to the Higher Pedagogical Institute or Institut Supérieur Pedagogique in French - were forced to leave their villages in the Djugu territory following attacks by CODECO, one of the multiple armed groups which operate in the region.

"I've been here for eight and a half years. Now we're hearing about Ebola," camp resident Janguzi said. "Look at the state of where we're sleeping. We don't

have any help whatsoever. We don't have soap or water, yet we're told to wash our hands regularly and be clean."

There is no vaccine or treatment for the rare Bundibugyo type of Ebola, which has been spreading undetected for weeks in eastern Congo. Standard tests struggle to detect the Bundibugyo. Over 1,000 suspected cases and at least 220 deaths had already been recorded as of Tuesday, including seven confirmed cases in Uganda. But the World Health Organisation and aid groups on the ground say the outbreak is much larger.

Ebola is a highly contagious virus and can be contracted from bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen. The disease it causes is rare but severe and often fatal. Symptoms include fever, headache, muscle pain, weakness, diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pain and unexplained bleeding or bruising.

Eastern Congo has for years seen attacks by dozens of separate rebel and militant groups, some of them with links to foreign countries or the extremist Islamic State group.

The Rwanda-backed M23 rebels are in control of parts of the region. While the Congolese Government still largely controls the northeastern Ituri Province, the epicentre of the Ebola outbreak, that control is tenuous.

The Allied Democratic Forces, a Ugandan Islamist group linked to IS, is one of the dominant rebel groups there and is responsible for violent attacks against civilian targets. Before the outbreak, humanitarian group Doctors Without Borders said in an assessment that the insecurity in Ituri had worsened recently, causing doctors and nurses to flee and leaving overwhelmed health facilities and, in some parts, "catastrophic conditions." (AP)



## PROSPECT

### LIC launches revamped Jeevan Sathi policy



LIC on Wednesday launched a revamped Jeevan Sathi plan, which offers a combination of savings and protection. New Jeevan Sathi single premium and New Jeevan Sathi Limited premium were launched by LIC CEO and MD R Doraiswamy. Both are joint life plans that cover a married individual, along with his/her spouse, in a single policy, LIC said in a statement. The minimum basic sum assured is ₹ 3,00,000. While there is no upper limit, the maximum basic sum assured will be subject to acceptance decision as per board-approved underwriting policy, it said. The minimum age at entry is 18 years, LIC said, adding that the maximum age at entry varies depending on the option chosen, as available under the two plans, by the policyholder.

### Antarmanh Consulting hosts Human Sustainability Summit



Antarmanh Consulting hosted the Human Sustainability Summit at the Indian Habitat Centre, New Delhi, bringing together policymakers, HR leaders, trust and safety leaders, wellness leaders and mental health professionals to deliberate on the future of work, AI, ESG priorities and the growing need for human-centric workplace practices. The summit was led by Seema Rekha, Founder Director, Antarmanh Consulting, and featured keynote addresses by Dr Dnyaneshwar Mulay, Former High Commissioner of India to the Maldives alongside Dr GP Rao, Founder & Managing Partner, GPR HR Consulting LLP and Ravi Shankar Sankaran, Chartered Accountant CFO, SMS Group. The summit also featured recognition segments honouring leaders and organisations contributing towards workplace well-being, sustainability and people-centric innovation.

## Indian Army Gajraj Corps hosts Sonitpur SAMVAD



**TONY DAS**  
Guwahati

The Gajraj Corps successfully hosted a Military-Civil Fusion Seminar at Tezpur titled "Sonitpur SAMVAD" — an initiative aimed at reinforcing civil-military collaboration under the overarching vision of "Samoochik Prayas Se Rashtranirman" with the guiding principle of "Rashtra Sarvopari."

The acronym SAMVAD embodies the core pillars of the initiative: Samanvay, Aatmanirbharta, Mansik Dridhta, Vishwas aur Vikas — Amritkaal ka Lakshya, Dhyeya Sarvopari.

The seminar witnessed participation from senior representatives of the State Administration and key institutions, including the Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, Inspector General SSB, Inspector General Sonitpur Range, Divisional

Forest Officer, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Chairman of the Bar Council and Municipality, members of the medical fraternity of Tezpur, including management representatives from private hospitals, Principal of the Skill Development Centre Mangaldoi, Additional Deputy Commissioners of Tezpur and Mismamari, along with several other important stakeholders.

Addressing the distinguished gathering, the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Gajraj Corps, highlighted JAI — Jointness, Aatmanirbharta and Innovation — as the guiding framework for building a secure, resilient and future-ready India in line with the national vision of ViksitBharat2047.

The GOC also emphasised the importance of coordinated action, convergence of institutional capabilities

and time-bound implementation of achievable goals to further national development and regional resilience.

In a significant step towards enhancing civil-military cooperation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH) and Army hospitals under Gajraj Corps. The collaboration aims to strengthen holistic mental healthcare through clinical support, professional training, research initiatives and community outreach programmes.

The initiative marks a meaningful advancement in fostering integrated development, institutional collaboration and collective nation-building efforts, while reinforcing the importance of mental well-being under the message.

## Brigadier NC Khuman reviews training at 1 Assam Battalion NCC Camp

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Nalbari

Brigadier NC Khuman, Group Commander, Guwahati Group, NCC, visited the Combined Annual Training Camp 34 being conducted by 1 Assam Battalion NCC at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Nalbari, on Wednesday. The CATC-34 commenced on May 23 and will conclude on June 1, 2026. The Group Commander was briefed by the Commanding Officer, 1 Assam Bn NCC on training activities being undertaken by over 520 cadets from schools and colleges across districts and the town of



Kamrup Metro, Nalbari, Baksa, Barma and Rangia. Cadets are undergoing training in drill, weapon handling, map reading, field craft, social service and community development during the 10-day camp. Brig NC Khuman inspected training areas, witnessed presentations by cadets and interacted with them. He emphasised the role of NCC in building character, discipline and leadership among youth. "NCC is shaping nation builders. Use this camp to learn skills that will serve you and Bharat for life," he told the cadets.

## Dr Ravindra Kumar Tyagi joins Power Foundation of India as DG

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Dr Ravindra Kumar Tyagi has joined the Power Foundation of India as director general on Wednesday. With over 35 years of distinguished experience in the power sector, Dr Tyagi brings deep expertise across power systems, transmission, asset management, engineering, business development, telecom, load dispatch, safety, and grid operations. Prior to this role, he superannuated as Chairman & Managing Director of Power Grid Corporation of India



Limited and also served as Director (Operations) and Executive Director (North-Eastern Region). An electrical engineer from Punjab Engineering College with an M.Tech in Energy Studies from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi,

Dr Tyagi is also a Fulbright Scholar from Carnegie Mellon University. A respected thought leader in the global power ecosystem, he has represented India in several international technical committees, authored over 50 technical papers, and contributed significantly to the development of global technical standards in transmission systems. His achievements include the prestigious 1906 Award for exceptional contribution towards IEC standards development and recognition from CIGRE as a Distinguished Member.

## Recognising the early signs of heart disease can save lives



**DR DK SATSANGI**

Heart disease is increasing rapidly in India, yet a large number of people still ignore its early warning signs. During my years of surgical practice and clinical research, I have repeatedly seen patients reaching hospitals only when their condition has already become critical. In many such cases, timely diagnosis and early treatment could have prevented serious complications and even saved lives.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that heart disease affects only elderly individuals. In reality, serious cardiac conditions are also found in children and young adults. Parents often overlook symptoms such as excessive fatigue during play, shortness of breath, bluish discoloration of the lips or fingers, recurrent cough, fainting episodes, or poor physical growth in children. These signs should never be ignored, as they may indicate an underlying congenital heart defect.

My research and surgical

experience involving complex and rare cardiac disorders have shown how dangerous delayed diagnosis can become. In one rare case, a young patient was found to have an unusual tumor inside the heart that initially appeared to be a routine cardiac problem. Such cases remind us that persistent symptoms like breathlessness, chest discomfort, irregular heartbeat, dizziness, or unexplained weakness require proper medical evaluation rather than self-medication or neglect. Work related to congenital conditions such as

Tetralogy of Fallot has also demonstrated that timely surgical intervention can completely transform a child's quality of life. Modern cardiac surgery today offers several effective treatment options, including cost-effective reconstructive techniques that can help patients even in resource-limited settings. What matters most is awareness and timely action. Equally important is post-operative care. Many patients believe that treatment ends after surgery, but recovery depends heavily on following medical advice carefully. Fever, infection, breathing

difficulty, chest pain, or unusual weakness after surgery should be reported immediately. Ignoring these warning signs can lead to avoidable complications. Lifestyle also plays a major role in protecting heart health. Regular health checkups, maintaining healthy blood pressure and blood sugar levels, avoiding tobacco, reducing stress, exercising regularly, and following a balanced diet are simple but powerful preventive measures. Prevention remains far better than emergency treatment. As a cardiac surgeon and researcher, I strongly believe

that awareness is one of the most powerful tools in modern healthcare. The human body often gives early warnings before a major cardiac event occurs. Listening to those signals and seeking timely medical attention can make the difference between life and death. Heart disease should not be feared, but it should never be ignored. Early diagnosis, informed decisions, and timely treatment can save countless lives.

The author is the ex-director — professor & head of cardio thoracic surgery, GB Pant Hospital.

## DAILY SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

**HOW TO SOLVE IT**

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.

			5					4
3	1							
		7		6	2			8
1	2	7						
8	3		1		6			7
					8	2		1
6		8	4		3			
							9	3
2			5					

**SOLUTION (27.5.26)**

3	5	1	7	6	8	4	2	9
4	7	9	3	2	5	6	1	8
2	6	8	1	9	4	7	5	3
6	4	7	5	1	3	8	9	2
9	3	5	4	8	2	1	7	6
1	8	2	9	7	6	5	3	4
8	9	6	2	5	1	3	4	7
7	1	4	6	3	9	2	8	5
5	2	3	8	4	7	9	6	1

## DOUBLE CROSSWORD THURSDAY | MAY 28, 2026

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42

- ACROSS**
- Contact causing a painful cry at the treatment centre (5)
  - Resentful: a bit grieved in any case (5)
  - Chap who took a chicken round for his mum (2-3)
  - This involves hot water and some steam (3)
  - It's essential to most Latvians, possibly 13
  - An animated character such as Homer (5)
  - Leslie, out of work, goes running (5)
  - Express in a sharp utterance (3)
  - Have another shot at photography (6)
  - Professionally, a good match (7)
  - The French hard-hearted king? (4)
- DOWN**
- It's a caper when one has only a half ticket (5)
  - The cover's a bit awry when the paper's torn (7)
  - The immortal love racket (4)
  - In the house, talk about the part of "Learn" (6)
  - Though humble, he has a fortune (5)
  - Science fiction's contribution to pepper pot design (5)
  - Margaret turns up with the treasure (3)
  - Favour a candidate of overt stupidity! (7)
  - The tanner's son, we hear (3)
  - Where a capital standard exists (5)
  - Seen as about five, but actually older (5)
  - Old-time dance! (4)
  - But not too self-important possibly to mop spill soup? (7)
  - Look angry enough to bring a gang leader down (6)
  - The village recidivist? (3)
  - Spaniard possibly sore about a bit of fun (5)
  - Pie aunt made as a bloomer (7)
  - Is carried free, on paper (5)
  - It gets an athlete nowhere (3)
  - Ensnare a girl with love (5)
  - See a silly imitator prance about (5)
  - He's ready for a rhyme (5)
  - Gets annoyed about the little pages making waves (7)
  - Publicity coming quietly to one's ears (5)
  - The maestro may take one in hand (5)
  - Vessel taking a regular part in a circulatory system (7)
  - In history, nothing to take abnormal pride about (6)
  - It's a singular cereal! (3)
  - For instance, possibly all out to be legitimate (5)
  - A better rebuttal (5)
  - One playing the piano in support? (5)
  - For each one, there's a supernatural beauty (4)
  - A pile of green apples (3)

**SOLUTION (27.5.26)**

ACROSS	19. Rene-W	DOWN	15. Lib.-el
1. Paras	20. Sal.-ted	2. Aachen	16. Debar
6. Say so	22. Lena	3. A-bus-Ed	18. Pearl
9. Bow-wow	24. Era	4. Sot. (rev.)	19. Reac.-Ted
10. Scout	25. Trailer	5. Sweet	21. Air-rant
11. A-ping	26. Scow-L	6. S-wall-ow	22. Lit-any
12. M-all-S	27. Marat	7. AS-p-s	23. Nebula
13. Leveret	28. MAGUS	8. Senlac	25. T-wain
15. La-d	29. Venison	12. Met-Ed	26. Save
17. En-i-d	30. Steed	13. L-ease	28. Mod
18. Police	31. Dylan	14. Violat. (Ted)	

## Punjab Governor to attend Samkalp Ludhiana annual felicitation programme on June 22

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Ludhiana

Governor of Punjab, Gulab Chand Kataria, has accepted the invitation to attend the annual felicitation programme of Samkalp Ludhiana as the Chief Guest, scheduled to be held on June 22, 2026, at Ludhiana, Punjab. In this regard, Narinder Mittal, President of Samkalp Ludhiana, met the Governor at Chandigarh along with Harish Sagar and Rajesh Nauharia and formally invited him to grace the prestigious annual event dedicated to honouring newly selected civil servants from Punjab. Speaking on the occasion, Narinder Mittal informed that during the programme, stu-



dents selected in the Indian Civil Services Examination, including IAS, IPS and other prestigious services, from across Punjab will be felicitated for their outstanding achievements. Established in 1986, SAMKALP (Headquarters: Delhi) has been working with the vision of guiding and grooming students to join the administrative services of the country with a spirit of nationalism, integrity and commitment towards human values. Under the aegis of Sahyog Shiksha Sewa Samitee, a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act and dedicated to education and social service, SAMKALP Ludhiana

has been actively conducting various guidance and mentorship programmes for civil services aspirants at school and college levels for the last nearly 10 years. Through its collective initiatives across India, SAMKALP has benefited more than 7,500 successful candidates, many of whom are presently serving the nation in important capacities in India and abroad. The annual felicitation programme of Samkalp Ludhiana has over the years witnessed the esteemed presence of several distinguished dignitaries, including governors, union ministers, members of parliament and eminent personalities from public life.

## Khadi-village industries product sales cross historic ` 1.87 lakh crore mark in FY26

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Khadi and Village Industries sector has surpassed an extraordinary journey of growth and transformation over the last 12 years. In the financial year 2025-26, the sales of Khadi and Village Industries products reached a historic level of ₹ 1,87,105 crore, marking the highest sales figure to date and standing as a powerful testament to rural India's growing entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and economic empowerment. Inspired by national campaigns such as 'Aatmanirbhara Bharat', 'Vocal for Local', and 'Local to Global', Khadi present-



ly is no longer merely a traditional product; however, it has evolved into a vibrant symbol of the 'New India's' self-reliant, indigenous pride, and rural prosperity. Creating new benchmarks in production, marketing, and employment generation, the Khadi and Village Industries sector has brought new energy and direction into the country's rural economy. While releasing the provisional data for the financial year 2025-26, Manoj Kumar, KVIC Chairman, stated that the Commission has established new records in the fields of production, sales, and employment generation. He highlighted that,

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE  
No. EM/PEP/TECH-30/2025/109  
Date: 22/05/2026

Name of the work: Maintenance contract of streetlights installed inside Port Township for a period of three years. Estimated Cost: Rs.2,73,71,558/- excluding GST. Last date & time of submission of bid: dt.15.06.2026 up to 18:00 Hrs. Refer our website for details <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.  
Sd/- Executive Engineer (E), (PEP-III)  
Paradip Port Authority  
PPA/PR/11/2026-2027 dtd. 26.05.2026



## BRIEFLY

### Gauff involved in minor car crash enroute French Open



Coco Gauff was involved in a car accident on the way to Roland Garros for the first match of her French Open title defense. She did not appear injured. "We got in a mini car accident on my way to the site today," Gauff told TNT Sports with a laugh. "We ran into a (pole). You felt a little impact. I spilled my juice all over the car. The car was not drivable. So we ended up taking a taxi," Gauff added after beating fellow American Taylor Townsend 6-4, 6-0. Gauff started her match earlier than expected when there was a retirement in another match on Court Philippe-Chatrier. "And then right before I went onto court, my dress got stuck, so my physio was in the bathroom trying to help me take it off," Gauff said. (AP)



## Sabalenka's necklaces sparkle in French Open

JEROME PUGMIRE/ANDREW DAMPF in Paris

Aryna Sabalenka's diamonds sparked in the sun during a first-round victory at the heat-soaked French Open.

The top-ranked Sabalenka looked light on her feet on Court Philippe-Chatrier, despite wearing two thick necklaces in a 6-4, 6-2 win against Jessica Bouzas Maneiro.

"Diamonds, I don't really feel the heaviness, but I can imagine how it looks from the outside," said Sabalenka, the tournament runner-up last year to Coco Gauff. "So I feel pretty comfortable. For me, it's important to look good."

The four-time major winner was initially going to wear three necklaces but said she thought that might be too much.

"It probably sounds a bit crazy, but when I feel good about what I'm wearing, how I look on court, I tend to perform much better," Sabalenka said. "I like to bring a little bit of a fashion on the tennis court. I know the dress that I will wear on the Grand Slam, and I just try to



come up with something to match the outfit." Sabalenka said she wasn't worried about protecting her jewelry when she's off the court.

"I have my fiance. He's kind of like my security," she said, smiling. "My physio does jujitsu, so I feel pretty secure walking around. If I go somewhere, I don't go alone."

Gauff began her title defense with a 6-4, 6-0 victory over fellow American Taylor Townsend, while four-time major winner Naomi Osaka beat Laura Siegemund 6-3, 7-6 (3) on Court Suzanne-Lenglen wearing a sequined gold playing dress.

Frenchwoman Lois Boisson, who made a surprise run to the semifinals last year when she was ranked 361st, lost 6-2, 6-2 to the 22nd-seeded Anna Kalinskaya.

For a third consecutive day, the temperature in Paris rose far above normal, reaching a scorching 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit).

"I'm from Florida, so this is nothing. Shout-out Delray Beach," said Gauff, who kept her spare rackets in a court-side cooler during the match.

Medvedev loses early again: The usually hot conditions made the courts faster than usual.

Daniil Medvedev usually thrives in such conditions but he struggled in a five-set loss to 97th-ranked Australian opponent Adam Walton. Walton, who received a wild card

invitation from tournament organizers, beat Medvedev 6-2, 1-6, 6-1, 6-6, 6-4. It was Medvedev's second straight first round exit here and third in four years.

"I know why I don't really play my best in Roland Garros, but if I say it, it's (making) excuses," he said. "So I keep it to myself."

Playing in the night session, top-ranked Jannik Sinner routed entry Clement Tabur 6-1, 6-3, 6-4 to extend his winning streak to 30 matches as he chases the only big title missing in his tennis career.

Stefanos Tsitsipas, the 2021 runner-up to Novak Djokovic, was leading 6-2, 3-0 against Alexandre Muller when his French opponent retired. Muller injured his right calf, three months after injuring his left calf.

Ninth-seeded Alexander Bublik was beaten 7-5, 6-7 (6), 6-4, 7-5 by Jan-Lennard Struff.

Alexander Blockx withdrew from the tournament with a right ankle sprain, making Alex de Minaur - his scheduled second round opponent - the first player into the third round.

Rising star: French teenager Moise Kouame made the perfect start to his French Open career with a 7-6 (4), 6-2, 6-1 win over Marin Cilic. (AP)

### Denmark goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel retires



Denmark and Celtic goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel, who was part of the Premier League-winning team with Leicester in 2016 in one of soccer's biggest shocks, has announced his retirement from soccer because of a serious shoulder injury. "When my contract with Celtic expires in June, my career as an active footballer stops," Schmeichel said in an interview with TV2 in Denmark broadcast Wednesday. "I think this is the right time now to announce that I have played my last professional football match." The 39-year-old Schmeichel has been sidelined since February. Schmeichel - the son of former Manchester United great Peter Schmeichel - revealed in March he required two surgeries but that he wanted to try to salvage his career. The former Manchester City, Leeds, Nice and Anderlecht keeper, who played at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, said "it's not how I would have wanted my career to end." (AP)

## Women's soccer star Alexia Putellas leaves Barcelona after 14 seasons



TALES AZZONI in Madrid

Two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas, who has helped women's soccer grow in Spain and worldwide, is leaving Barcelona after 14 seasons.

Barcelona said Tuesday that Putellas will officially bid farewell at an event at Camp Nou stadium on Wednesday, giving the club a "chance to recognize the legacy created by a player who has become a role model on and off the field and who has helped women's football to grow across the globe." The 32-year-old Putellas on Saturday helped Barcelona win the Champions League title for the fourth time in six

seasons. There was no immediate announcement about her next move, with speculation in Spain that she may join the fast-emerging



London City Lionesses. Putellas attended a Lionesses game in London in January. Putellas played 507 games for Barcelona - second on the all-time list - since arriving at age 18 in 2012 from Levante, the Catalan club said.

Putellas scored 232 goals for Barcelona, a club record, and won 38 trophies, including four Champions Leagues and 10 Spanish league titles. "The time has come to acknowledge that I've given everything for these colors," Putellas said in a video posted on her social media accounts. "It's been a perfect story."

She was Barcelona's best player when it won its first Champions League in 2021 and helped put women's soccer in Spain on the global map when she won back-to-back Ballon d'Or awards in 2021 and 2022. Her boost to the sport was considered key to helping Spain win the 2023 World Cup. When Spain was embroiled in crisis after its then soccer federation president Luis Rubiales kissed a player without consent during

the World Cup awards ceremony, it was Putellas who led the player revolt that prompted his downfall.

"We've taken the women's team further than we ever imagined," Putellas said. "At the beginning, being a soccer

player wasn't even recognized as a profession. Now I feel privileged to have been part of this change." (AP)

## Norway Chess: Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa have awful day

AJAI MASAND in Oslo

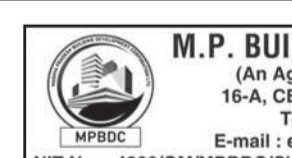
D Gukesh ran out of steam and surrendered to Wesley So in Armageddon after failing to convert his classical promise, while red-hot Frenchman Alireza Firouzja tore past R



Praggnanandhaa to storm to the top on a bruising second day for the Indians at Norway Chess here.

Defending champion Magnus Carlsen was pushed to the brink yet again by German sensation Vincent Keymer before the seven-time champion finally escaped with an Armageddon victory, clawing his way to his first points of the tournament after another fierce battle.

Despite the disappointing second-round Armageddon result, Gukesh stayed joint second with So on 2.5 points, while the rampant Firouzja opened up a commanding lead with six points after back-to-back wins. Praggnanandhaa and Carlsen, meanwhile, languished at the bottom with 1.5 points each in the prestigious event. To make matters worse for Gukesh, who will turn 20 in a couple of days, So bluntly remarked after the game that he was "not quite sure" the Indian was as strong as his rating suggested. Gukesh, visibly shaken by the Armageddon defeat, tried to put up a brave face during his mandatory broadcast duties, but the frustration was hard to miss when he walked away with anger and disappointment written all over his face. In the marathon classi-



cal battle lasting 116 moves, it was Gukesh who did most of the pressing and appeared to be cruising towards the winning line before So somehow escaped with a draw. The American then completely outplayed the Indian in Armageddon, claiming 1.5 points to Gukesh's one and handing the world champion a crushing disappointment.

**M.P. BUILDING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**  
(An Agency of Govt. of M.P. Public Works Department)  
16-A, CEDMAP Building, Arera Hills, Bhopal (M.P.)-462011  
Telephone No. : 0755-4853297, 0755-4853295  
E-mail : einc-mpbdc@mp.gov.in, dgmhmpbdc@gmail.com  
Bhopal, Dated : 27.05.2026

### NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Madhya Pradesh Building Development Corporation Limited (MPBDC) Bhopal invites online tenders for the following works :-

- Construction of 150 bedded Boys Hostel at Adhartal Dist. Jabalpur M.P. PAC : Rs. 952.31 Lakhs
- Renovation Upgradation and New Construction work at Govt. P.G. College Dist. Seoni M.P. (2nd Call) PAC : Rs. 850.74 Lakhs
- Construction of 50 bedded Boys and 50 bedded Girls Hostel at Sandipani School at Sagar Mandla Dist. Mandla M.P. (2nd Call) PAC : Rs. 367.76 Lakhs
- Construction of Sports complex at Dist. Neemuch M.P. PAC : Rs. 530.61 Lakhs
- Construction of Hockey Synthetic Turf ground at Mandideep Dist. Raisen M.P. PAC : Rs. 502.86 Lakhs
- Integrated Sports Complex at Banda Dist. Sagar M.P. PAC : Rs. 634.79 Lakhs
- Construction of Integrated Sports Complex at Dist. Chhindwara M.P. PAC : Rs. 607.61 Lakhs
- Construction of sports stadium at bagh, Dist. Dhar M.P. PAC : Rs. 565.23 Lakhs
- Construction of integrated sports complex at Dist. Allirajpur M.P. PAC : Rs. 534.857 Lakhs
- Construction of Integrated Sports Complex at Dist. Mandla M.P. PAC : Rs. 534.85 Lakhs
- Construction of Integrated Sports Complex and Synthetic Athletic Track at Dist. Mandasaur M.P. PAC : Rs. 479.69 Lakhs
- Construction of Integrated Sports Complex and synthetic athletic track at Rajiv Gandhi Khel Parisar Dist. Bhind M.P. PAC : Rs. 479.69 Lakhs
- Construction of Integrated Sports Complex at Hatta Dist. Damoh M.P. PAC : Rs. 431.72 Lakhs
- Sports Complex at Batiyagarh Dist. Damoh M.P. PAC : Rs. 352.57 Lakhs
- Construction of Boundary wall of Madhya Pradesh State Shooting Academy, Bhopal PAC : Rs. 350.97 Lakhs
- Construction work of Indoor and Outdoor Sports Complex in Rajendra Nagar Ward No. 37, Bhopal. PAC : Rs. 265.43 Lakhs
- Construction of Sports complex at Kolaras Dist. Shivpuri M.P. PAC : Rs. 237.44 Lakhs
- Construction of Hockey Synthetic Turf at Dist. Umaria M.P. PAC : Rs. 479.69 Lakhs
- Construction of boundary wall shed of Madhya Pradesh State Horse Riding Academy, Bhopal PAC : Rs. 103.93 Lakhs
- Contract for Comprehensive Housekeeping & Sanitation Services (Two Shifts : 08:00 AM to 04:00 PM and 02:00 PM to 10:00 PM) including Supply of Cleaning Materials and Machinery for a period of Two (02) Years. PAC : Rs. 32.98 Lakhs (NIT No. : 2879/GM/MPBDC/CW/MISC/26/NIT-80 Bhopal, Dated: 04.04.2026)
- Photo Copy and Spiral Binding works. PAC : Rs. 13.91 Lakhs (NIT No. : 2879/GM/MPBDC/CW/MISC/26/NIT-80 Bhopal, Dated : 04.04.2026)
- Providing, placing, installation and erection of furniture, AV system etc. for New Medical College and 500 bedded Hospital at Budni District Sehore. PAC : Rs. 1,324.54 Lakhs (NIT-82 : 3320/GM/MPBDC/CW/26/NIT-82 (PART-1) Bhopal, Dated : 17.04.2026)

Detailed NIT and tender documents can be viewed, downloaded and purchased online for from 01.06.2026 at 18:00 hrs. to 22.06.2026 at 15:30 hrs. for (S.No.-01 to 05), 03.06.2026 at 18:00 hrs. to 24.06.2026 at 15:30 hrs. for (S.No.-06 to 19), 01.06.2026 at 18:00 hrs. to 16.06.2026 at 15:30 hrs. for (S.No.-20 to S.No.-21), 26.05.2026 at 18:00 hrs. to 16.06.2026 at 15:30 hrs. for (S.No.-22) from website www.mptenders.gov.in. PAC can vary at the time of uploading of tender document. Any amendment/corrigendum 'if any' will be published on website only, will not be published on newspapers.

M.P. Madhyam/126074/2026

### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that my party, Aadhaar Housing Finance Limited Khandwa, Property situated at Ward Mahanjanpeth, Ward No. 01, Circle No. 01, Burhanpur, R.I.C. and Block Burhanpur, Tehsil and Distt. Burhanpur, in the jurisdiction of Nagar Palika Nigam Burhanpur, as per Nazul Record Nazul Block No. 56, Plot No. 85/1, House No. 144, area 996.50 sqft. as per site part First area 94.43 sqft. Second part area 182.75 sqft, third part area 720 sqft. total area 996.50 sqft. which is recorded in the name of Mrs. Rakhi Sindhe W/o Mr. Gopal Sindhe having following Boundaries on East-Gali Rasta, West-House of Ramesh Shyamal, North-House Valid bhai and Other, South-Gali Rasta. Aadhaar Housing Finance Limited branch Khandwa is providing loan to the prospective borrower Mr. Mrs. Rakhi Sindhe W/o Mr. Gopal Sindhe on the property of the said Nazul block. If any person, institution, body, bank, government, semi-government department, local government department etc. have any objection regarding the loan given on the said property, then all concerned may write to us within 7 (seven) days of publication of this open notice. Got proof. Otherwise, no objection will be valid after the expiry of the time period. Please know the information

**MUKESH N. MALAKAR**  
(Advocate, Notary & Legal Consultants)  
Reg. No. HP/924/2012  
B.Com, LL.B.(HONS.) LL.M., M.A., M.S.W.

**केनरा बैंक Canara Bank**  
A Government of India Undertaking  
Regional office -1st Floor, Sai Baba Complex, Near GDA Building, Phool Bagh, Gwalior Ph. 0751-2423126

**POSSESSION NOTICE**  
(Rule 8 (1) For Immovable Property)

The Understanding being the Authorised officer of the Canara Bank Under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, in exercise of the power conferred under Section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 issues a demand notice on below mentioned date to the following Borrowers/Guarantors, calling upon them to repay the amount mentioned in the respective Notice with in 60 days from the date of receipt of said notices. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, Notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on dates mentioned below, the borrowers/Guarantors in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the properties will be subject to the charge of Canara Bank, for an amount herein below mentioned & interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provision of Section 13 (8) of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Name and Address of Borrower/Property Owner	Outstanding Amount (Rs.)	Description of the Property
<b>Branch: Canara Bank, Khurai, Mob.: 90398-83050, Email: cb4257@canarabank.com</b>		
<b>Borrower : 1. Shri Prashant Kurmi S/o Ghanshyam Singh Kurmi</b>	<b>Rs. 14,32,235.00/-</b>	<b>Property Owner: Shri Prashant Kurmi S/o Ghanshyam Singh Kurmi, Smt. Narayani Thakur W/o Ghanshyam Singh Kurmi - EMT of House Situated at Plot No. 50/8, Village Reethore, Patwari Hika No. 28, Sahodara Bai Rai, Ward No 27, Khurai, Sagar 1452 Sqft M.P., Boundaries: East: 6.0 Mtr Wide Road, West: Plot of Kallu Tiwari, North: 6.0 Mtr Wide Road, South: Plot of Jain Sahab</b>
<b>2. Smt. Narayani Thakur W/o Ghanshyam Singh Kurmi</b>	<b>+ Interest and Other Expenses - Recovery</b>	
<b>Add: Gram Odamad Post Sarkhedi-Tehsil Khurai, Sagar Madhya Pradesh- 470117</b>	<b>Demand Notice: 30-01-2026</b>	
	<b>Possession Date 22-05-2026</b>	
	<b>Symbolic Possession</b>	

**PLACE: GWALIOR DATE : 27-05-2026 AUTHORISED OFFICER CANARA BANK**

### BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL, BENCH AT INDORE

IN TP 35 of 2019 [TP 145/2016(CP 60 of 2015)]  
(Ramesh Chand Jain and ors. Vs Chand Prabhu Homes Pvt. Ltd. And ors.)  
**NOTICE OF COMPANY PETITION TO RESPONDENTS**

To,

- Shri Kalyanmal Jain S/o Shri Rajmal Ji Jain R/o. 59/1 Kalali Maholla, Flat No. 403, Ojas Vallies, Shradhdhan Marg, Chawni, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Vimal kumar Jain S/o Kapoor Chand Jain R/o 213/03 Nanda Nagar Indore
- M/s. Sanjay K Jain & Company, Chartered Accountant, Abkari Road, Behind Samiti, Pratapgarh, Rajasthan, 312605.
- Shri Anil Jain S/o. Shri Mangilal Jain R/o. 878 Janta Quarters, Nanda Nagar, Indore.
- Smt. Tripti Jain W/o. Shri Yogesh Jain R/o. 221, Telephone Nagar, Towerwala Banglow, Indore (M.P.)
- Smt. Shashi W/o. Shri Sardarmal Jain R/o. 221, Telephone Nagar, Towerwala Banglow, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Jambhu Jain S/o. Dr. Shri Virendra Kumar Jain R/o. Haat Road, Guna (M.P.)
- Shri Amit Jain S/o. Dr. Shri Virendra Kumar Jain R/o. Haat Road, Guna (M.P.)
- Shri Ashish Jain S/o. Shri Devendra Kumar Jain R/o. 300-M, Khatiwala Tank, Indore (M.P.)
- Smt. Archana Jain W/o. Shri Ashish Jain R/o. 300-M, Khatiwala Tank, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Ashish Kashmire S/o. Shri Manoharal Kashmire R/o. 199, Baabji Nagar, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Shalendra Pamnani S/o Shri Vashudev Pamnani R/o. 35/1, Shahid Bhagat Singh Colony, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Tabrez Khan S/o. Shri Abdul Samad Khan R/o. 139, Sector-N New Green Park Colony, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Pramod Palival S/o. Shri Mangilal Palival R/o. Palival Sanatory, 923, Godha Colony, Tower Chouraha, Near SBI, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Umesh Yadav S/o. Late Shri Tuliram Yadav, R/o. 2147-D Sector, Sudama Nagar, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Jasminder Singh Sudan S/o. Shri Amarjeet Singh Sudan R/o. 66-67, Bhagwandeen Nagar, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Ashok Yadav S/o. Shri Ramadhar Yadav R/o. 54-C, Vidhaya Palace, Aerodrum Road, Indore (M.P.)
- Smt. Sangeeta Jain W/o. Shri Chanchal Jain R/o. 11, Chodmal Colony, Jhangampura, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Nilay Yadav S/o. Shri Ashok Yadav R/o. 54-C, Vidhaya Palace, Aerodrum Road, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Alok Shah S/o. Shri Ramchandra Shah R/o. 335, Sai Kripa Colony, Near Bombay Hospital, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Dipendra Sahu S/o. Shri Ramgopal Sahu R/o. 426, Sadhu Vaswani Nagar, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Deepak Kapur S/o. Shri Raj Kapur R/o. 426, Sadhu Vaswani Nagar, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Vipin Modi S/o. Late Shri Vijay Kumar Modi R/o. Dhakad Colony, Behind Nakhrali's House, Guna (M.P.)
- Shri Vipin Singh Saluja S/o. Shri Narendra Singh Saluja, R/o. 81-B Shivapuri, Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Hitesh Soni S/o. Late Shri Mahesh Soni R/o. 185, Revenue Nagar, Anapurna Road, Indore (M.P.)
- Smt. Ekta Yadav w/o. Shri Umesh Yadav R/o. 2147-D Sector, Sudama Nagar Indore (M.P.)
- Shri Chandan Jain S/o. Shri Sheelchand Jain 11 Chodmal Colony, Jhangampura, Indore. (M.P.)

Whereas the petitioner above named has filed a Company Petition under section 397-398 of The Companies Act, 2013 calling in question the Oppression and Mismanagement of the Respondent No. 1 Company.

Whereas upon hearing the case on 16.04.2026, Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Indore has directed to issue notice to the respondents.

Hence, you are hereby summoned to appear in this Tribunal in person or by pleader duly instructed and able to answer all material question relating to the petition or who shall be accompanied by some person able to appear all such question on 11.06.2026 to answer the claim and you are directed to produce in that day all the documents on which you intend to rely in support of your defence.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day before mentioned the petition will be heard and determined in your absence.

Thanks & Regards  
SD/  
Mr. Ramesh Chand Jain

**बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda**

**E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE**

Appendix-IV A [See provisio to rule 8(6) & 6(2)]

**SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES**

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) & 6 (2) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/charged to Bank of Baroda the Secured Creditor the Physical Possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Bank of Baroda Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis for recovery of Amount mentioned below plus interest and other expenses due to Bank of Baroda the Secured Creditor from below mentioned Borrowers & Guarantors.

Name of the Branch/ Borrower / Guarantors/ Mortgager	Description of Secured Assets (Movable/Immovable Properties)	Reserve Price	Date and Time of E-Auction	Demand Notice Date
		EMD	Possession Date	
		Bid Increase Amt.	Outstanding Amount	
<b>Borrower : Mr. Anand Agrawal S/o Agarchand Agrawal Business</b>	Equitable Mortgage of Property (Residential Plot) situated at survey no 302/17, PH No. 66, Settlement No 693 area 0.009 Hect. Mouja Surgaon Tehsil and District Betul (MP) belonging to Anand Agrawal bounded as under: North: Kachcha Road, South: Land of Umesh Bhavsar, East: Remaining Land of Seller, West: Remaining Land of Seller	₹ 2,70,000/-	22-06-2026	02.12.2023
		₹ 27,000/-	2:00 p.m. to 06:00 p.m.	as on 02.12.2023
		₹ 10,000/-		₹ 1,94,040.76 +interest & other charges

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in Bank of Baroda website: <https://www.bankofbaroda.bank.in/e-auction.htm> & <http://BAANKNET.com> Also, prospective bidders may contact the authorised officer on 6262034639

Please Note : For any error(s) the details available on bank's website : <http://BAANKNET.com> will be final.

Date: 26.05.2026, Place: Bhopal

Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda



## Not worried about wicket, aim to pressure bowlers: Patidar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
n Dharamsala

Royal Challengers Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar on Tuesday said a fearless approach of not worrying about being dismissed, and looking to put bowlers under pressure, is his mantra after powering his side to the IPL final with a 92-run win over Gujarat Titans.

Patidar went hammer and tongs in his 33-ball 93 not out which included nine sixes and five fours and lifted RCB to a highest-ever total of 254 for five in an IPL knockout game.

In reply, Gujarat Titans were blown away for a mere 162 in 19.3 overs as RCB, the defending champions, stormed into a second consecutive final.

"(It was a) super game for us, the way the batters dominated, striking with intent, was good for us. It wasn't a clear plan, but we were ready for it, have to show some body language that we are ready for you, every batter showed it, attacking mindset," Patidar told the broadcaster after the match. "I take a few balls 8-10 balls to see how the wicket is doing and then I have a clear mind to go about it, I'm not worried about my wicket. I try and put the bowler under pressure."

"The wicket was not that easy

"This is one of those games we'd like to forget and start over." — Shubman Gill after GT's crushing defeat against RCB in the IPL knockout



to get under the ball and hit, there was variable bounce. The way GT played till now, we were clear we had to get their three main batters out in the powerplay, and it worked," he said.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who returned 4-0-28-3 to reclaim the Purple Cap, said the credit also has

to go to the support staff that help RCB bowlers draw their plans.

"A lot of credit goes to the men behind the scenes, the kind of plans and the way we executed those plans. The experience of Hoff (Josh Hazlewood) and me is useful, but the support staff has been outstanding," he said.

"They set up the plans and we're executing. I can say we're data informed, if there's places where we can improve, we do refer it, but we don't go 100 per cent. We make a lot of effort not to give room, get those leg-before wickets and bowled, we do a lot of planning," Bhuvneshwar added.

Gujarat Titans' skipper Shubman Gill conceded it was not their day after the 2022 winners were pummelled by RCB batters in the first half and strangled by their bowlers in the second. GT, chasing 255, had slipped to 88 for eight in 11.2 overs to concede the game.

"We were going pretty well up until the 12th, 13th over, and I don't think our fielding was at par, dropping a couple of catches, and then our ground fielding was not up to the mark," Gill said.

"This is one of those games that we'd like to forget and start over in Mohali."

"I don't think it was our day, the intensity was right there, but under pressure situations, we were not up to the mark," he added. Gill said it is all about making the most of the powerplay but his side was not able to get a strong start.

"It's all about getting a good start. If you get a good powerplay and on a ground like this we know the ball travels and the outfield is also very quick," he said.

"If you (GT) would have gotten off to a good start in the powerplay, any target with the kind of way the wicket was playing and the kind of ground that we were playing at, it could have been chaseable," the India batter added.

## Poor fielding cost GT against RCB: Glenn Phillips



AMANPREET SINGH n Dharamsala

Gujarat Titans batter Glenn Phillips admitted that scoreboard pressure and sloppy fielding hurt his side badly in the crushing 92-run defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru in IPL Qualifier 1, but insisted the team would quickly move on ahead of the Eliminator.

Chasing a daunting total after Rajat Patidar's explosive unbeaten 93 powered RCB to 254 for five, GT crumbled to 162 all out as their top order failed to cope with the mounting pressure.

Phillips, who did not feature in the match, said the target became increasingly difficult after RCB's early strikes with the ball.

"250 any day is a tough ask to chase without everything going your way. There's obviously a huge amount of scoreboard pressure when you're trying to chase 250 and very few teams have done it," Phillips said after the game on Tuesday.

"We went out there and gave it everything. Unfortunately, when you're trying to chase 250, everything has to go right and obviously it didn't," he added. Phillips felt the

surface itself was not impossible for batting despite the massive first-innings total.

"It obviously produced plenty of runs for Rajat and a couple of the other boys in the RCB side. But as Rahul (Tewariya) showed as well, it was still good enough to bat on in the second innings," he said.

The New Zealander also pointed to Gujarat Titans' poor fielding effort, including a costly dropped chance off Patidar, as a decisive factor in the contest. He was on 20 then.

"Especially in playoff games, fielding becomes really crucial. You can bowl well and bat well, but if you field badly, you're still going to lose," he said.

"Rajat made us pay big time today. You can't win games if you can't take catches."

Phillips, however, said the issue was more about mindset than skill execution in the field.

"It's probably more of an attitudinal shift than anything else from a fielding perspective, making sure that we want the ball and want to do something special," he said. Despite the heavy defeat, Phillips said GT are fortunate to have another opportunity through the playoffs format and backed the side to recover quickly. (PTI)

## Nihal Sarin qualifies for Esports World Cup's chess event



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
n Mumbai

Indian Grandmaster Nihal Sarin, representing esports and gaming content outfit 8BUL, has qualified for the chess event of the upcoming Esports World Cup (EWC) in Paris through the Champions Chess Tour (CCT) leaderboard. He has joined teammate Aravindh Chithambaram, becoming only the second Indian player to qualify for the prestigious tournament so far. This year's EWC chess competition will have a prize pool of USD 1.5 million (Rs 14.3 crore) and will take place from August 11 to 15.

Overall, the EWC is set to take place from July 6 to August 23 featuring over 2,000 players from 200 clubs across more than 100 countries competing for a record-breaking prize pool of USD 75 million (₹ 718 crore).

The CCT season featured two major events, the Speed Chess Championship (SCC) 2025 and Chess.com Open (CCO) 2026. Nihal narrowly missed out on direct qualification through the CCO after finishing fourth, just one spot away from qualification, but still secured 100 crucial leaderboard points from the event.

He further added points through consistent performances across the TTGP circuit, including one point in the Autumn Split and four points in the Winter Split. A standout second-place finish in the Spring Split ultimately helped him accumulate 34 points and finish with a total of 139 points in the standings to secure his berth at the EWC 2026.

The top three players from both SCC and CCO secured direct qualification to the EWC, while players finishing between fifth and ninth in SCC, along with the remaining participants in CCO, earned points toward the CCT leaderboard based on their performances.

In addition to these events, players also accumulated points through the Titled Tuesday Grand Prix (TTGP) circuit, which was divided into Autumn, Winter, and Spring splits featuring 13 Titled Tuesday tournaments each.

## RCB's collective firepower makes them a 'complete tea', says Bobat

AMANPREET SINGH n Dharamsala

Royal Challengers Bengaluru director of cricket Mo Bobat credited the franchise's "collective contributions" and fearless identity after the defending champions thrashed Gujarat Titans in Qualifier 1 to storm into a second successive IPL final.

RCB, who piled up a massive 254 for five before bundling out GT for 162, were powered by skipper Rajat Patidar's blistering unbeaten 93 off 33 balls and an all-round bowling effort on Tuesday.

Bobat said the biggest take-away from RCB's dominant run over the last two seasons was the number of players stepping up consistently in pressure situations.

"I'm especially pleased that we've got a number of people contributing to wins. We're not too dependent on one or two players with the



bat or one or two with the ball. We've got a number of people contributing and that's the really pleasing thing," Bobat said after the 92-run win.

"If everybody contributes and fulfils their roles, then results should take care of themselves. That's probably the most encouraging

thing to come out of today's game, as well as the fact that obviously you're into the final," he added.

Bobat reserved special praise for captain Patidar, whose explosive innings dismantled the Titans attack after RCB lost a couple of early wickets.

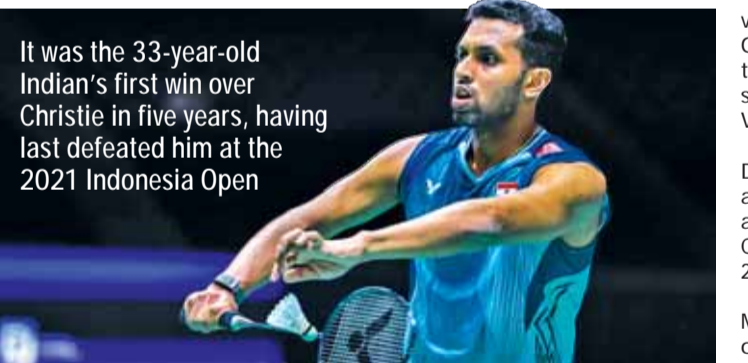
"He's certainly batting brilliantly right now and that was a really special knock today. I'm sure he'll be really pleased about being able to stand up in a big qualifier and a big game," he said. (PTI)

## Prannoy stuns Christie, Lakshya beat Lu in Singapore Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA n Singapore

Star Indian shuttlers HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen advanced to the men's singles second round with stunning wins at the USD 1,000,000 Singapore Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday. Prannoy, a 2023 World Championships and Asian Games bronze medallist, produced a composed performance to prevail 10-21 21-12 21-18 over the world No. 5 Jonatan Christie of Indonesia in just over an hour.

It was the 33-year-old Indian's first win over Christie in five years, having last defeated him at the 2021 Indonesia Open.



Prannoy, who played epic roles in India's 2022 Thomas Cup triumph and the recent bronze medal win in Denmark, will face Singapore's former world champion Loh Kean Yew next.

Later in the day, Lakshya, a 2021 World Championships bronze

winner, saw off world No. 24 Lu Guang Zu 21-17 21-15 in 42 minutes to set up a second-round clash with second seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn.

The Indian mixed doubles pair of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto also advanced to the second round after beating Malaysia's Wong Tien Ci and Lim Chiew Sien 21-14, 20-22, 21-13 in their opening match.

However, Kidambi Srikanth and Malvika Bansod couldn't cross the opening hurdle.

Srikanth, a former world No. 1 and a 2021 World Championships silver medallist, fought his heart out before succumbing 20-22 21-19 17-21 to local hero Loh Kean Yew, who

avenged last week's loss to the Indian.

Malvika, who is on a comeback trail after recovering from an ACL injury, also couldn't go the distance despite putting up a brave effort, losing 21-11 19-21 12-21 to Chinese Taipei's Lin Hsiang Ti.

In women's doubles, Panda sisters — Rutaparna and Svetaparna — lost 9-21 17-21 to Thailand's P. Aiamvareesrisakul and S. Janpen in another match.

**Prannoy vs Christie:** Coming into the match with a 3-7 head-to-head record, Prannoy found himself against the wall again when Christie zoomed past him in the opening game.

## Athletics: India to host 2027 Asian Relays and 2028 Asian Indoor Championships



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
n New Delhi

The Indian cities of Chandigarh and Bhubaneswar were on Wednesday awarded hosting rights of next year's Asian Relays and the 2028 Asian Indoor Championships respectively by the continent's athletics governing body during its executive council meeting in Hong Kong. The Asian Athletics Association's (AAA) council meeting was held ahead of the Asian U20 Championships from May 28 to 31.

"India has got the Asian Relays in 2027 to be held in Chandigarh and Bhubaneswar will host the Asian Indoor Championships in 2028. It's a very proud

moment for the country," World Athletics Vice-President Adille Sumariwalla, who attended the AAA council meeting in Hong Kong, said.

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) had last year submitted the bids to host both the events. The Asian Relays in Chandigarh will be the third edition of the event.

The inaugural edition was held in Bangkok in 2024 while the second chapter will be held in Shaoxing, China from June 20-21 this year.

The state-of-the-art indoor facility at the Kalinga Stadium complex in Bhubaneswar will be the venue for the 2028 Asian Indoor Championships, likely in February.

## Indian sporting fraternity mourns former shooter Randhir Singh's death

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA n New Delhi

Olympic gold-medallist Abhinav Bindra led the tributes as the country's sporting fraternity mourned the demise of veteran administrator and former shooter Randhir Singh, describing him as a "true stalwart" and a charismatic leader of Indian sport.

India's first shooting gold medallist at the Asian Games, Singh died here on Wednesday after battling age-related ailments.

"Deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Raja Randhir Singhji. He lived a life devoted to sport as an Olympian, as a sports administrator, and as someone who contributed immensely to Indian and World sport.

"His legacy will remain an important part of our sporting history. My heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones," Bindra wrote on X in his tribute.

Singh's brilliant sporting journey included five Olympic appearances and the historic trap gold medal at the 1978 Bangkok Asian Games.

"A distinguished leader of the Olympic Movement, Raja Randhir Singh dedicated his life to the



service of sport and the advancement of the Olympic values across Asia.

The Olympic Council of Asia extends its sincere condolences to his family, friends, colleagues, and the entire Olympic family. May he rest in peace," stated the Olympic Council of Asia, which Singh headed until earlier this year.

Cycling Federation of India secretary general Maninder Pal Singh described Singh as an administrator of exceptional stature and humanity.

"It is with the deepest sorrow that we bid farewell to Raja Randhir Singh, the most wonderful administrator, a man of exceptional humanity, and above all, a great and cherished friend. His passing today marks the end of an era in sport-not only in India but across the world.

"With his charismatic leadership and unwavering dedication, Raja Randhir Singh carried a legacy of the highest distinction, always upheld with the utmost dignity and grace. That legacy remains unparalleled and will never be forgotten," he added.

Singh's administrative career matched the success of his competitive days.

He served as the secretary general of the Indian Olympic Association from 1987 to 2010 and was also a member of the International Olympic Committee in different capacities from 2001 to 2014. "It's a very very shocking news. Raja saab was so nice and kind to everyone in the field of sports. My heartfelt condolences to his family. We pray almighty God for his departed soul may rest in peace," said IOA member ID Nanavati said.

## Harmanpreet returns to lead India in FIH Pro League's European leg

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
n New Delhi

Captain and ace drafflicker Harmanpreet Singh on Wednesday returned to lead a 24-member Indian men's hockey squad for the European leg of next month's FIH Pro League, which will be a crucial preparatory competition ahead of the World Cup in August.

Harmanpreet had missed the Hobart leg of the Pro League in February citing personal reasons. The Indians will first travel to Brussels for training and a friendly match from June 7 to 9.

Following this short camp, the squad will be in Rotterdam in the Netherlands from June 10 for the Pro League matches against Germany and the Netherlands scheduled for June 14 to 21.

Thereafter, the Indian team will fly to London, where it will face Pakistan and England in the



Pro League from June 23 to 28. The squad features a blend of seasoned veterans and young talent to solidify the core team heading into the World Cup, which begins August 15.

India's captain and leader of the defence Harmanpreet will be backed by a robust unit comprising Amit Rohidas, Jarnanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh and young defender Amandeep Lakra.

The mid-field will be anchored by the experienced duo of Hardik Singh, Manpreet Singh and Vivek Sagar Prasad, besides Raj Kumar Pal.